BLUEPRINT

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An Update to Hate Speech Policy Across the School District

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Blueprint strives to uplift voices in our community with truth and transparency

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Behind the scenes of cover's art

Dear *Blueprint* Reader,

In designing the cover, it is our goal to capture the ideas of *Blueprint* articles effectively by portraying the pieces visually. For this issue's cover on new DEIB regulations for hate speech, we did not want to make it seem that the purpose of the new regulations was to silence people unfairly. We went with a subtle approach, opting to use bold colors, shapes, and symbols with paper-like textures to communicate the feeling of a physical file. We came up with many different ideas and styles, but ultimately decided on one that was simple, yet effective.

Within the design, a bright collage of sharp speech bubbles filled with comically censored text is trapped in the shape of a muted volume button. The use of red, orange, and yellow, as well as jagged shapes conveys a sense of hostility. The complete absence of cool-toned colors was very intentional, as those generally portray calm, community-like nature. We wanted to make it clear that the reason these regulations are being enforced is in part because of the damage hate speech does to communities. In contrast, the volume button is rounded at the corners, with cleaner lines. The background is manila folder-esque, intended to suggest that it could be a discipline record or file. Background simplicity is also important, indicating the sense that the hate speech and the loud, jagged shapes are becoming contained and not making their way out into a bigger space.

To see more of our graphics from the cover story, turn to page 20.

Sof Cerruti & Bo Chevaleau, Senior Graphics Editor & Head of Graphics

Letter from the Editors

Dear *Blueprint* Reader,

We are so excited to share the sixth issue of *Blueprint* Volume 85. In this issue, *Blueprint* covers many on-campus and community events, from 3v3 Basketball to senior nights for winter athletes to the Commonwealth Club's local forum on China-US relations. *Blueprint* also reports on instructional changes for Acalanes in 2025, including Wi-Fi website bans and new Advanced Placement courses.

In our cover story, *Blueprint* examines recent changes to the Acalanes Union High District's DEI and DEIB policy at district and site levels that come amidst recent student concerns on discriminatory language. *Blueprint* also explores where evolving national policy at the turn of new federal leaders stands as it relates to the District. To closely understand the update's causes and future impacts, *Blueprint* spoke to Members of the school's diverse student body, Acalanes Parent Club DEIB Committee, Aclanes and District Administration, and the Bias Incident Reporting System Team.

As always, to submit a response to any story within our paper, scan the QR code to submit a letter to the editor through *Blueprint* Online. Please refer to the bottom of the Table of Contents for *Blueprint*'s mission statement. We hope you enjoy this issue of *Blueprint* and look forward to sharing more stories in the future.

Maya Agarwal & Avery Robb, Print Editors-in-Chief

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Rethinking Future Geopolitics

The Commonwealth Club hosts Lafayette forum to discuss US-China dynamics

Maya Agarwal, Molly Connelly, and Mila Ellis | Print Editor-in-Chief, Print Feature Editor, and Staff Writer

Photos by Cade McAlister

In classrooms across the world, children raise their hands with curiosity seeking clarity and new ideas. That same curiosity continues amongst adults, this time with questions charged about the international relations that shape the world as we know it.

Amidst shifts in Western leadership and international dynamics, the Commonwealth Club World Affairs of California held a forum on Feb. 6 at Lafayette Library's Don Tatzin Community Hall discussing current and future U.S.-China relations. The event functioned as a fireside chat and allowed attendees to ask any questions they had, both about China's history and political and economic relationship with the U.S.

As the nation's oldest and largest public affairs forum, The Commonwealth Club hosts hundreds of discussions every year on domestic and international topics spanning culture, society, artificial intelligence, and the U.S. economy. Former U.S. Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and George W. Bush, Civil Rights Leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Former House Speaker and Current California Representative Nancy Pelosi, environmental advocate Jane Goodall, and Former Microsoft Co-Founder and current Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Bill Gates include some of Commonwealth's renowned speakers.

"The mission of the Club is to engage people in public dialogue, help people discuss important issues, inform people about issues, and facilitate people to discuss them together in a respectful way, even if their viewpoints disagree. So, its [purpose is] to build better citizens, a stronger democracy, a more informed public," The Commonwealth Club World Affairs of California Co-President and Co-CEO Dr. Gloria Duffy said.

As the two largest economies and global powers in the world, the U.S. and China share a rich and complex history reaching back centuries. The re-election of President Donald Trump and China's growing influence as a global economic and geopolitical powerhouse raise questions about potential shifting dynamics between these two world powers, which the forum aimed to discuss.

"The question is 'is China ... [a] threat to the U.S. economically [or] from the security standpoint?' ... I think everybody is wondering and thinking, 'How can we best approach China?' That was the reason for the topic. There's a lot of uncertainty about our relationship with China," Dr. Duffy said.

With this in mind, along with the intention to inspire open discussion, the Club's East Bay Chapter Head, Michael S. Baker, chose this topic and hosted the event.

"These events are obviously off the news ... but we can't forget about them, we can't let them get out of our vision and consciousness, so we need to be talking about them. Also ... Americans need to be more informed about China," Baker said. "Just as our speaker Andy Rothman said, not many of our kids are going to study [in China] anymore and not many of their kids are coming here, so we need to have a lot more cooperation and ... communication."

The Commonwealth Club structured the event as a discussion between forum moderator Margaret Conley and speaker Andy Rothman, who shared his experiences working with China throughout his career as a former U.S. Diplomat and the current Founder and CEO of Sinology LLC, a consulting firm that helps companies interact with the Chinese government and private Chinese businesses. Prior to the event, Conley addressed the goals of the conversation.

"We're going to talk about the U.S.-China relationship, which has been going through ups and downs for many, many years, and it's at a particularly difficult time ... My colleague, who's the real expert, is going to tell us more about why

we're doing it now," Conley said.

Many attendees came to the forum to hear more about U.S.-China relations, with many seeking clarity about current issues involving China, such as tariffs and potential national security risks. The event covered Rothman's personal experiences in China and his personal foreign interactions with both citizens and the government, as well as broader issues. The fireside chat also included a Q&A for audience members to ask both Rothman and Conley questions or voice skepticism.

"So the point is, to hear and understand someone is not to say that you have to agree with them, but you understand where they are coming from, and that's what we need more of. Which is another reason why I was here tonight, I want to understand China. I want to learn more about Vietnam and Cambodia, including Republicans or Democrats. You've got to understand folks regardless of what you agree with," attendee Ron Wetter said.

During the fireside chat, Rothman discussed studying abroad in China during college, working in the Foreign Service for 17 years, his current role in providing advice to institutional investors and companies about benefits and risks with China's economy, and changes to U.S.-China relations.

"I think my biggest takeaway from tonight, from both of the speakers, was that China is evolving ... but we don't have a good understanding of why that's happening and where it's going," Wetter said.

Many attendees appreciated the Commonwealth Club's public forum style, as a change from news outlets and online sources. The event served as an opportunity for attendees, regardless of prior knowledge, to share information and gain an understanding of U.S. and China standings.

Event Moderator Margaret Conley and Speaker Andy Rothman lead Q& A discussion.

"You hear so much in the news about China without really having any good understanding, so I think it's important to hear a little bit more with someone talking about the facts and what is really going on, from someone who has expertise," attendee Suzanne Fryer said.

Following an hour-long dialogue between Conley and Rothman, audience members asked questions for about half an hour, ranging from topics such as the history of the Chinese government, how the U.S. government perceives the actions of the Chinese government, and current interactions between the two nations.

"[When I asked a question], one thing I mentioned was the Salt Typhoon. China has incredible cyber capabilities, and I fully expect them to use them in the near future for various purposes," attendee Kiara Kunnes said.

As discussions opened to the audience, attendees also shared a variety of opinions and conversations throughout the event, with some challenging prior points of the night's speakers.

"Diversity to me is all about diversity of thinking. And diversity of thinking means getting a lot of different people into the room, who will share different experiences and different perspectives," Wetter said.

Relaying open dialogue disclosed in settings like Commonwealth's forums can bridge audience takeaways beyond the room by informing future citizen decisions.

"There's always new information you don't get in the media that come from people who are experts following a topic very very closely and [who are] very knowledgeable with a lot of background. So, I hope people take away new information like that from tonight's program and then continue to [discuss] it with each other, educate one another, use it when they come to vote, decide what candidates to support, how to vote on different issues, how to spend their money, [and] how to invest," Dr. Duffy said.

As organizations like the Commonwealth Club continue to host public forums nationwide, similar initiatives continue to develop within the community. Students recognize the importance of youth activism and discussion and are taking a stance to help tackle these global issues, proving that age is not a limitation.

"There's a ton of miscommunication that goes on between the U.S. and China but I doubt there has been much progress made to resolve these issues. We're still trying to figure out ways to implement more activities and meetings that serve to bridge the misunderstandings and implicit biases or stereotypes on Asians and Chinese people," Chinese Student Association Club President and sophomore Angela Lin said.

Educating for the Election

Profiling Leadership elected members for the 2025-2026 school year

Maddyx Bride, Sophie Gold, Mika Katznelson, Gwyneth Lee, and Natalie Pecci |
Head Copy Editor, Business Manager, and Staff Writers

From catchy slogans to captivating posters, Leadership candidates run their campaigns in hopes of attaining elected student body positions.

Leadership released the elected candidates for the 2025-2026 school year on Feb. 20, including Associated Student Body (ASB) officers, spirit commissioners, and class officers. From Feb. 26-28, students casted their votes, and winners were announced on March 3.

Courtesy Photo/Bryce Birdsong

Bryce Birdsong: ASB President

Junior Bryce Birdsong brings a unique experience to his role as ASB president, currently serving on ASB as secretary. Additionally, his participation in many different campus activities, such as clubs and sports, furthers his experience and knowledge of the Acalanes community.

"I would say that my number one qualification for the role is that I'm currently on ASB. I'm ASB secretary ... I feel like through my extracurriculars, I reach a lot of people on campus, and I've built a lot of relationships. So, I think that I have a pretty good understanding of the student body," Birdsong said.

Birdsong aims to create a campus and culture where students feel like they belong and are welcomed. He hopes to unite all students into a cohesive community.

"I would say that the main platform I'm running on is inclusivity, striving towards creating a school culture where everyone feels included regardless of their grade or their sexual orientation, gender, what have you, and just an inclusive space where people feel confident in being themselves," Birdsong said.

Courtesy Photo/Oliver Stoneman

Oliver Stoneman: ASB Vice President

Junior Oliver Stoneman has been a member of Leadership and class president for three years. Now, he is looking to move to a position where he can serve the entire Acalanes community and have a greater impact.

"I've spent three years in the leadership program prior to this, all as class president. I've loved my work as class president and the experience I've gotten from it, but I really want to move up to a position where I can service our entire campus and community as a whole," Stoneman said.

With the ASB vice president being in charge of club registrations, Stoneman wants to use the opportunity to improve club life at Acalanes.

"Vice president is specific to clubs, and I think there's a lot of clubs that don't actually operate. They just are a club on paper but don't actually meet ... I don't want to get in the role just to get rid of clubs, but I think it would be great if we could create some sort of atmosphere where every club is meeting and they enjoy their meetings [so] we have a better, more enthusiastic club life at Acalanes," Stoneman said.

Courtesy Photo/Sveva Mauch

Sveva Mauch: ASB Secretary

Junior Sveva Mauch has been a member of Leadership for one year as the Board Head of New Crew. She aims to represent marginalized communities on campus and give everyone a voice.

"Being on ASB, I think that we really do come together, and I would love to be a voice for those people on campus that fall under the radar," Mauch said.

While Mauch has only been in leadership one year, she has a variety of experiences that further her skills and help her serve Acalanes better.

"Taking on an ASB position would be so much more work and commitment, but I am ready ... I have been hoping for a position like this for my entire high school career and hope that the opportunity will present itself in my senior year," Mauch said.

Courtesy Photo/Dhruv Mahadevan

Dhruv Mahadevan: ASB Treasurer

Sophomore Dhruv Mahadevan has been a part of Leadership for two years and currently serves as the Sophomore Class Treasurer. Mahadevan plans to create an inclusive environment for all students.

"I would like to see a more involved student body in a lot of campus events and a more connected, less [cliché] student body where we can all kind of rally around the same common causes [and] support each other," Mahadevan said.

Mahadevan also hopes to bring the student body together and encourage students to show up for one another.

"[My goal is] just creating a more involved student body [where] everybody [has] a more positive attitude towards on-campus events, clubs, teams, every extracurriculars ... and we show up for each other in every single way possible," Mahadevan said.

Courtesy Photo/Michela Barbano

Michela Barbano: Spirit Commissioner

Sophomore Michela Barbano is currently a member of the Spirit Board. As a spirit commissioner, she aims to connect and unite Acalanes as one.

"I feel qualified because of my previous experience on the Spirit Board and my delegation to make our Acalanes community feel unified and connected," Barbano said.

Barbano hopes to foster a sense of connection through creating excitement and energy at all of the various events, supporting fellow students and peers.

"I will strive to create a campus of inclusivity that is shown in all spaces of our school," Barbano said.

Courtesy Photo/Amayel Guiro

Amayel Guiro: Spirit Commissioner

Junior Amayel Guiro's previous experience with the Acalanes and leadership community contributes to her qualifications for spirit commissioner.

"I have two years of leadership experience being a member of [the Spirit Board] then being a Board Head. I have gotten the Spirit Award in waterpolo for the past two years. I have also gotten the Spirit Award in swim, and I hope to get it again this year," Guiro said. "I believe I'm good for this role because I'm an outgoing and enthusiastic person that can make our student section better."

Guiro plans to encourage spirited participation in a plethora of sporting and performing arts events.

"My main goals for the position … [are] to enhance Blue Crew by encouraging people to support events outside of football. I think it's important for all sports as well as performing arts to get the same recognition as football does," Guiro said.

Courtesy Photo/Stella Hamilton

Stella Hamilton: Spirit Commissioner

Despite being in Leadership for only one year and serving on the Spirit Board, sophomore Stella Hamilton feels that her experience with leadership through sports will prove beneficial. She supports others and brings energy to every event.

"I like showing up for different sports and cheering people on in different sports, and I love getting everyone [hyped up] at games," Hamilton said.

Hamilton strives to make everyone feel included and uplifted and to further school connection.

"I want to create an inclusive community between all the sports and also between all the leadership boards, … making sure everyone is connected and feels included," Hamilton said.

Courtesy Photo/Emme Martin

Emme Martin: Spirit Commissioner

Being in leadership all three years at Acalanes, junior Emme Martin feels that her experience as a class officer and on the Rallies Board make her a strong candidate for spirit commissioner.

"I really know what it takes to get our student body involved and excited about certain things. I really want to take that kind of experience I have and bring it to the games and events," Martin said.

Martin's love for the Acalanes community inspired her to run for spirit commissioner. She has goals to make the school as inclusive and fun for every student as possible next year.

"I really want it to be something that every student, no matter what group, no matter what grade, [is] excited to be at whatever event from games to performing arts. I want everyone to ... be proud to be a part of our Acalanes student section," Martin said.

Acalanes students also voted for their 2025-2026 class officers from Feb. 26 to Feb. 28. Students from each grade ran for their respective class president, class treasurer, and class secretary.

If you are interested in learning more about the 2025-2026 elected class officers, visit the* Blueprint *online website to read the full coverage.

Class of 2028	Class of 2027	Class of 2026
Jack Roberts Class President	Nikhil Hunn	Stella Pacheco
Grey Helfrich Class Treasurer	Grace Colaco	Gemma Greenaway
Brynah Mccall Class Secretary	Grace Eppinger	Alexis Le

Blueprint Graphic/Aamena Shipchandler

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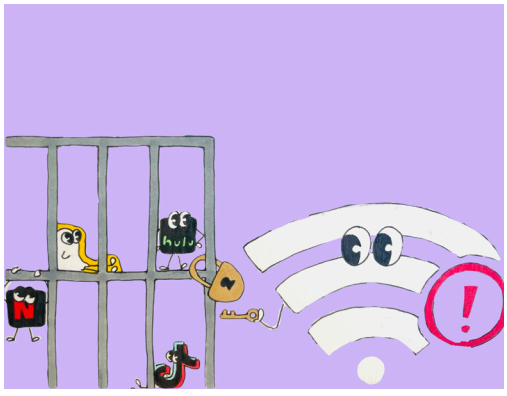
Social Shutdown

AUHSD Wi-Fi bans on social media and games

Maddie Obertello, Tselmeg Orgilmunkh, Audrey Tugade | Staff Writers

Graphic by Sof Cerruti



Between classes, during lunch, or even inside the classroom, Acalanes students regularly open their phones for a quick scroll, using games and apps like Netflix, Snapchat, or TikTok when they want entertainment. However, this student behavior will no longer be possible at Acalanes.

On March 3, the Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) disabled apps and websites that were previously accessible on the school Wi-Fi. The AUHSD prompted this change in efforts to improve school learning environments.

"There's been discussion up with the faculty and administration about what we can do to create the environment that's most conducive to learning, and so there's a discussion about what sites should be accessible through the Wi-Fi. It was decided that with a few exceptions, social media sites and streaming sites did not need to be accessible," AUHSD Superintendent Dr. John Nickerson said.

The ban will not restrict applications that are used for educational purposes such as Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Pinterest. The district aims to instead remove common classroom distractions and maximize engagement and learning.

"There are some students who spend time scrolling through social media rather than engaging in learning, and I would hope there would be some reduction in that," Dr. Nickerson said.

Although some students use social media as entertainment, others need it for publicity in elective classes on apps like TikTok.

"I think that it is a good idea to keep students off of their phones during academic classes, but it's definitely going to have a negative impact on our social media efficiency ... It's definitely going to heavily affect what our class time in Leadership is going to look like, but I think that we will figure it out," Publicity Board member and senior Kristina Thompson said.

While the District hopes the new policies will improve student engagement, others feel that the change might be unsettling for students as it infringes on their current access to certain applications and resources.

"I understand what it's coming from, but it doesn't mean I'm a huge fan. I think a lot of students are gonna be upset over the fact that their freedoms are being taken away, but I understand where this school is coming from, and our Wi-Fi does need improvement, so it makes sense," AUHSD student representative, Associated Student Body secretary, and senior Heloísa Mateus said.

Some students, while recognizing the need for classroom focus, feel the Wi-Fi update will disrupt break-time activities and infringes personal autonomy.

"I have heard some discussion [about the ban], and for the most part it is pretty negative as people sometimes spend lunch on entertainment programs and don't want to give up that break," junior Lauren Anderson said.

Other students seem in favor of the ban because they believe device usage prevents students from forming bonds at Acalanes, especially outside of instructional time.

"I don't really think that [social media] is used in classes as much as it is at lunch when you should be talking to your peers and your friends, but you are just scrolling on Instagram instead of actually having a social connection," sophomore Eloise Greeson said. "I think [the ban] is really gonna help people to talk to their friends instead of scrolling on their phone and be more social."

Teachers who share this concern of social media distractions notice similar issues in the classroom. They recognize that social media and games have distracted students and prevented learning during class.

"In my computer science class where we have to be on computers, I do see a lot of folks tabbing to sites that they shouldn't necessarily be on," Advanced Placement (AP) Computer Science and Geometry teacher Alexis Tamony said.

Some students echo this observation, attesting to the challenges that emerge when one plays games or checks their socials rather than completing assignments.

"There's so many other things that you could be doing that are better for your mind and beneficial. I mean games and stuff are super fun obviously. Sometimes I'd rather do them than do my work, but then I realize that I regretted that decision. I should've done my work," Greeson said.

However, other teachers have not experienced devices causing disruptions in their classroom, specifically in courses where devices are not a daily part of the lesson plan.

"I would not say [social media and game usage] is a big issue in my class because I don't use computers or phones," English teacher Erik Honda said.

As educators, many teachers empathize with this ban and feel that it is important to guide students on balancing device usage and productivity.

"It's part of our job as adults and the school system to be able to figure out how we help [students] use technology in a good way, and we don't think students have mastered their use of technology," Honda said.

As students increasingly rely on devices in the classroom, schools are attempting to understand how to use it effectively rather than negatively.

"I think there's a lot for us to figure out, we're going to have to navigate the future with phones or something like that, so how are we going to do it in a healthy way? That's what schools are trying to figure out," Honda said.

With the increasing importance of devices, some are concerned about how reliance on technology will affect humanity.

"Our brains are literally being rewired because of how addictive these social media platforms are, and without guardrails, I'm really worried about where our society's headed in terms of our addiction to these little devices that are constantly screaming for our attention," Tamony said.

Lifting Lafayette: 2025 Citizen of the Year

The Lafayette Chamber of Commerce selects Ann Appert as 2025 Citizen of the Year

Maddie Obertello and Mila Ellis | Staff Writers

Courtesy Photo/Ann Appert

From advocating on the school board to hosting library events and helping out in Girl Scouts, Ann Appert's community involvement impacts all corners of Lafayette. Many recognize and admire her commitment to Lafayette's community engagement.

The Lafayette Chamber of Commerce selected Appert as the 2025 Citizen of the Year (COY). The 74 year-old tradition commemorates one outstanding citizen each year for their extensive contributions to the city. The Lafayette Park Hotel will host a celebration dinner on April 10, 2025, to honor her and her dedication to the community.

"I think the overall goal (of COY) is to show that giving back to the community is honored and appreciated. We want to build it for the next generation of community service and our volunteers that really helped out," Director of Operations at Lafayette Chamber of Commerce Holly Sonne said.

Recognizing local individuals helps uplift those who have put extensive time into the Lafayette community. Each year, the Lafayette Chamber awards citizens based on a list of criteria that a good COY would have.

"We look for collaboration and partnership. In general, it's that breadth of things that they've done and the number of people they've touched, over a long number of years," Lafayette Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors President and Selection Committee member Matt Pease said.

Along with character traits and community involvement, the Chamber looks to highlight those who have "unrecognized contributions," who may not always have been in top leadership positions.

The selection committee consists of the previous winner, the President of the Board of Directors at Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, and a representative from the city. Together, the members of the selection committee work together to narrow down the nominees.

"The three of us evaluate the write-ups and talk about the person's qualifications and the pros and cons of all the individuals that are submitted. Then we vote and make a decision," Pease said.

This year, Ann Appert was selected due to her community involvement, which spans over many years.

"She's been involved in the elementary school board, with the library, youth home, she's been spearheading the recent Community Day which we hold every year in June, and she was even a Girl Scout leader. She's been doing this for a long period of time, and the people that nominated her were some of the top leaders in our community. A few of them have won the award in the past," Pease said.

With her early involvement as a board member of Lafayette Nursery School, Appert's engagement in the community gives context to her selection as COY.

"Right away I started volunteering there on the board ... As my kids went into school I got involved with Parents Club [and] ended up president of Parent Club at Happy Valley, very involved with what at the time was [Lafayette Arts and Science Foundation], now it's called [Lafayette Partners in Education] … I ran for school board, volunteered on a couple of different parcel tax campaigns that got me involved with the school board world," Appert said.

Beyond education, Appert played a role in the development of a five-mile loop around Happy Valley. Today, the path serves as a great form of exercise for community members as well as a safety precaution.

"When we moved here, there were no sidewalks. My kids and I lived just a half mile from Happy Valley school. The kids could not even walk to school because there was nowhere to walk except on the street. So, another person had the idea for [the loop] and worked with the city, and then we raised the money for it," Appert said.

According to Lafayette citizens, one of the reasons Appert was nominated was because of her large roles in community initiatives, such as the reconstruction of the Contra Costa Library, and ongoing commitment to the Lafayette Community Foundation.

"She's really been deeply involved in our community, and that's why I really recommended her to be a citizen of the year … I thought she was really an unsung hero, working so hard for our community for so many years," former Lafayette Mayor Anne Grodin said.

Although awarding a sole citizen of the year has been a longstanding tradition, some believe highlighting more of Lafayette's dedicated citizens could honor their commitment and further encourage supporting the community.

"I think what would be helpful actually is if there was more spotlighting of the candidates because it shouldn't be a popularity contest but at the same time, there are many people who are nominated who do lots of great things, that it would be nice if folks just realized that ... there were five or six other people who were in the running," 2023 COY recipient Mike Anderson said.

Appert values the tradition and its uplifting intentions, while also suggesting that her work for the community is more rewarding than the acknowledgment. The award helps to encourage participation and connection within the community and serves as an effort of appreciation for winners, but never the original goal.

"I do think it's important to acknowledge people, even if it's not their motivation for going into it, but also I think that the ritual builds community. I mean it's very healthy for the community to look around once a year and say who should we nominate for that, like who's out there doing things for the community? It kind of creates an attitude of gratitude," Appert said.

Student-Teacher Showdown

Acalanes students and staff compete in 3v3 basketball tournament

Tselmeg Orgilmunkh, Audrey Tugade, and Shiraz Kamran | Staff Writers

Photos by Tselmeg Orgilmunkh and Audrey Tugade

Students cram into the Chris Huber Gym to watch their teachers and peers face off in a heated game of 3v3 basketball, hoping to come out victorious.

Students and teachers faced off during lunch from Feb. 24 through Feb.28 in basketball, building excitement and school spirit. Leadership hosted the event hoping to encourage friendly competition and bring entertainment to Acalanes.

"We like to host staff and student events throughout the year as a way for adults and students to connect. Students also like watching their teachers compete in various competitions. [3v3] basketball started pre-COVID and has grown to be a beloved tradition of who will take the trophy from year to year," Activities Director Katherine Walton said.

Students from across all grades signed up to participate in 3v3 basketball this year. Some students participated because of excitement and experiences in past years.

"I think [3v3 basketball] is a good idea. I remember last year watching as a freshman and it was fun to watch," 3v3 participant and sophomore Sam Phillips said.

Some students in leadership hope to create playful memories with teachers, outside of a more serious environment like the classroom.

"[The event] increases the connection and the community at Acalanes. It is so much fun to watch students beat teachers" Student Life Board member and sophomore Eleni Woods said.

Outside classroom events such as 3v3 basketball, that include student and teacher interactions, can help foster relationships between faculty and students.

"I just love the idea of student-staff competition [and] getting to partner with other students over the years. It's just a good way for students to see our teachers in another light. It's a good way to get a little competitive juice going," math and Engineering teacher and 3v3 basketball participant Michael Buchel said.

During the game, teachers and students battled it out. Team Joey + the Chestnuts and Team Dubs played a close game during the championship round with Team Joey + the Chestnuts ultimately taking the victory.

3v3 can help encourage teacher-student bonds, helping students feel they have an adult on campus who supports them.

"We want every student to have an adult on this campus that they can trust and go to, if they need to. We also want to help build good relationships between students and also students and staff. I think the out-of-classroom activities help achieve both goals," Walton said.

News Briefs

Acalanes Spring Blood Drive

Mila Ellis | Staff Writer

Acalanes hosted its Spring Blood Drive on Tuesday, Feb. 25. The Red Cross, a nonprofit humanitarian organization that supplies blood, provides disaster relief, and administers training, conducted the annual event. The event gave students over the age of 16 the opportunity to donate a full pint of blood, which is drawn over the span of an hour. Male donors over the age of 17, with type A negative, type B negative, or type O blood were eligible for a Power Red donation. The specific donation collects only red blood cells, returning most of the plasma and platelets to the donor.

The blood collected from the Blood Drive went to hospitals to treat patients with severe injuries, surgeries, or other conditions. Some cancer patients may also receive blood for certain treatments.

The blood drive will return in the fall, where students will be encouraged to participate again.

Black Excellence Month Activities

Maddie Obertello | Staff Writer

In celebration of Black Excellence Month, Leadership arranged various activities throughout February to acknowledge Black History and connect students of all grades.

Students and teachers spent the past few weeks creating various poster-design arrangements to put on classroom doors. These door decorations honor individuals such as authors Jesmyn Ward and Colson Whitehead, journalist Alex Haley, artists Kerry James Marshall, Kara Walker, and Beyoncé, poet Amanda Gorman, and American park ranger Betty Reid Soskin.

On Feb. 21, the Black Student Union (BSU), the Feminism Club, and the Steminist Club gathered to watch *Hidden Figures* at 5:00 p.m, complete with a potluck event where students were encouraged to bring something to share with other attendees.

The Acalanes Unified High School District (AUHSD) held a district-wide school dance called the Quad City Dance at Las Lomas, on Feb. 28. Leadership classes and BSUs from across all four schools planned the event with a jersey theme, and students were encouraged to dress to represent their favorite sports teams.

To read more about Black Excellence Month activities, visit *acalanesblueprint.com* for the full coverage.

DEIB Debriefs

Zinnia Khan | DEIB Director

Women's History Month

Every year, a presidential proclamation deems March to be Women's History Month. The month, set aside to honor women's contributions to American history, began as a local celebration in Santa Rosa, California. The Education Task Force of the Sonoma County Commission on the Status of Women planned and executed a "Women's History Week" celebration in 1978. The movement spread across the country as other communities initiated their own Women's History Week celebrations, the following year.

In 1980, a consortium of women's groups and historians—led by the National Women's History Project (now the National Women's History Alliance)—successfully lobbied for national recognition. In February 1980, President Jimmy Carter issued the first Presidential Proclamation declaring the Week of March 8 as National Women's History Week. Women's History Month officially became a month in 1987 when Congress passed a resolution designating March as "Women's History Month."

On the Acalanes campus, students can honor Women's History Month by attending Feminism Club meetings at lunch on Wednesdays in room 413. The Feminism Club also intends to host a speaker event, in which a woman from the community will discuss the trials and successes of her career with an audience.

"Especially right now, Women's History Month is crucial in understanding and reflecting on the ways women have been able to lift each other up throughout history. Now more than ever, we cannot regress in our recognition of womens' achievements and contributions to our world, as we continue to fight for our spots as leaders of the future," Feminism Club Vice President Sadie Poole said.

Ramadan

Ramadan, the ninth month of the Lunar Calendar, is a time for Muslims across the world to draw closer to God, renew their faith, and practice self-control. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, which is based on a 12-month lunar year of approximately 354 days. Because the lunar year is 11 days shorter than the solar year, each lunar month moves 11 days earlier each year, meaning that Ramadan falls in a different place on the Western Calendar each year. This year, Ramadan falls from Friday, Feb. 28 through Saturday, March 29 on the Gregorian Calendar.

During Ramadan, Muslims abstain from food and drink during daylight hours. This fast is called *sawm*. To get through a long day without food, Muslims will often wake up early to eat a meal called *suhur* before the sun rises. During the day, Muslims are encouraged to engage in charity and devote extra time and attention to spiritual activities, such as praying and reading the Quran. The fast is broken with an evening meal, called iftar, once the sun goes down.

Eid al-Fitr is the celebration that marks the end of 30 days of fasting and brings in the next month, *shawwal*. Friends and families gather for festive meals and exchange gifts. Special gifts are also given to the poor. On the Acalanes campus, students can celebrate Ramadan, or learn more about the month's history and practices by attending South Asian Student Union meetings or Muslim Student Union meetings.

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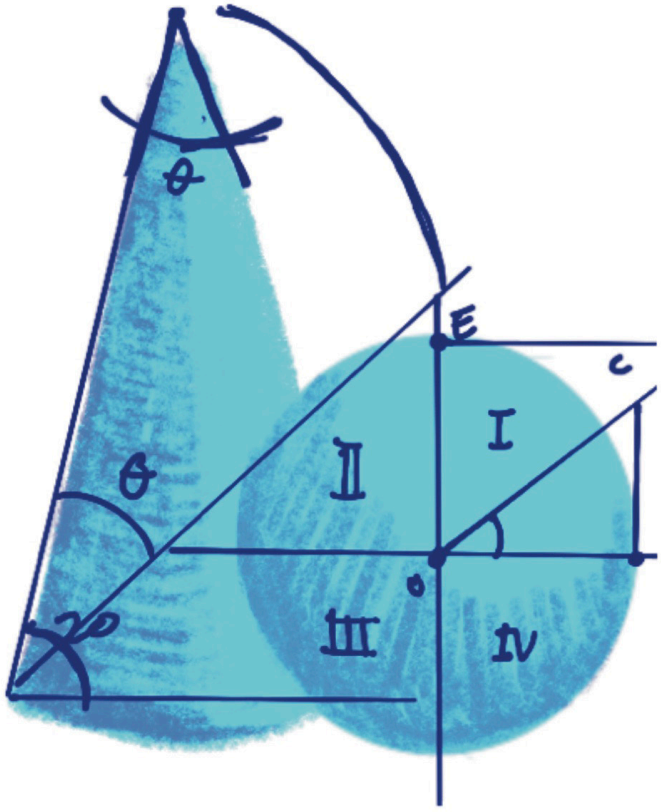


Course Changes at Acalanes

New AP classes for the 2025-2026 school year

Hannah Geraghty, Tselmeg Orgilmunkh, and Audrey Tugade | Business Manager and Staff Writers

Graphics by Bo Chevaleau

Students across the country know May to be a daunting month, a time where hundreds of thousands of students prepare for the same tests: the Advanced Placement (AP) exams. May means thousands of timelines for history classes, practice problems for calculus courses, and pages and pages of notes.

Two new AP courses are being implemented at Acalanes High School starting in 2025-2026, giving students a wider selection of 24 AP classes total to challenge themselves when picking new classes this spring. The new classes being offered are AP Precalculus and AP Drawing.

To foster interest and curiosity on new topics, many believe it is crucial to offer a wide variety of classes. Administration selected the new courses based on student interest, giving students a range of new options when selecting courses.

"Our master schedule, the courses we offer at each site, are determined by student interest. So, if there is a demonstrated student interest or an anticipated student interest, the principals work to have those classes brought to their school," Acalanes Union High School District Associate Superintendent of Educational Services John Walker said.

When schools have a new class added to the curriculum, significant work is required to prepare for the upcoming school year to best educate students.

"Offering a new course means a teacher needs to learn that material, develop that course, develop the lessons and get prepared and organized, which is a lot of work. But we have an amazing teaching staff that has always been able to do that," Walker said.

Many students view the availability of the new courses as an opportunity to further understand certain subjects and challenge themselves on a more complex level.

"I think it's important to deepen your skills if you're interested in a certain subject. So for example, if you really enjoy science, it can give you insight to what the courses might be like in college," sophomore Eloise Greeson said.

Although there are high levels of interest in these new courses, some are worried students will feel stressed and overwhelmed due to the number of AP classes now offered.

"There was a lot of feedback about what can become a stressful overloaded schedule for students when they take too many [AP] classes, so that's always a concern ... Perhaps students might have a schedule that is too demanding in terms of time, and might have to sacrifice necessary sleep or other activities that they love," Walker said.

Although the increased demand from AP classes might cause students to feel overwhelmed, Acalanes' decision to offer a wider range of classes in different subjects and difficulty levels allows students to grow and learn skills for college.

"Every kid that comes back to visit me after going to college say they feel that Acalanes prepared them very well for college," counselor Susan Martin* said.

Although taking AP classes increases the rigor of one's course load, many Acalanes students challenge themselves with these college-level courses. In response Acalanes offers a variety of classes to accommodate the various academic interests and levels.

"We have a very academically motivated student body at all of our schools who are ready for more rigorous classes, especially when they're in eleventh or twelfth grade. So we want to be able to provide challenging courses that will prepare them for what they want after graduation," Walker said.

AP Precalculus

According to the Acalanes Course Catalog, the AP Precalculus course will go in-depth on the content to prepare students for future college-level math classes and the AP test.

Before AP Precalculus was being considered as a course, some students took the AP exam without taking the class. Taking AP Precalculus will better prepare students because the content will be geared towards preparing for the AP exam at the end of the year.

"AP Precalculus is funny because last year and this year even, students were asking about the AP Precalculus test, so the kids were already coming in to take the test, so now at least we're offering the class. We're just trying to keep up with you guys," Martin said.

The honors course transitioned to an AP class after California's public universities began accepting the test results.

"[The math department] feels like public schools in California should drive what we're doing, and once some of the public schools in California started to accept that [AP] test, we figured we had to make some adjustments," math and engineering teacher Misha Buchel said.

AP Precalculus will cover the course material from Precalculus Honors but have additional resources to prepare students for the AP test. The class could add pressure to students, but provides benefits like college credit.

"What I think the difference will be is that the students will have an additional platform to work with, they will have the AP platform in their computers ... They are going to have the pressure of the test they will have to do, that changes things. But what's cool is they can get college credit for the class," precalculus teacher Diana Miller said.

Some students hope to expand their knowledge of math and feel challenged so they are ready for future classes including AP Calculus AB.

"I am hoping to learn a lot about trigonometry and also extend my skills for Algebra Two so that I can be more confident and be prepared for calculus," Greeson said.

Some students in the past took Precalculus Honors and then took the AP test to get credit. Additionally, some of those students preferred it as an honors class, and believe that making it an AP is confusing.

"I think it was fine as an honors class because it was already more challenging than a normal math class would be. It seems slightly impractical to be an AP because nobody really takes precalculus in college, but I get why they made it an AP because it's supposed to be slightly advanced," former Precalculus Honors student and junior Alvera Bamorya said.

Despite the presence of a specialized AP Precalculus class, the Algebra 2/Precalculus Honors (A2PCH) course will not change as a result and will still focus on preparing students for subsequent calculus classes.

AP Drawing

According to the College Board, the organization behind AP classes, AP Drawing focuses on the motives behind art, how artists make their pieces, and how artists present their works.

AP Drawing differs from current art classes offered at Acalanes by focusing on the art form of drawing specifically in a more structured and deeper curriculum. AP Drawing aims to develop students' drawing skills and knowledge.

"The other [AP] class that we already currently offer is AP 2-D Art and Design. The difference between the two is that the drawing class is based upon more traditional media, both painting and drawing, with an emphasis on the drawing aspects," art teacher Robert Porter said.

AP Drawing will not just focus on the art that's created, but also the process behind creation and what it means to make art.

"It's very much based on inquiry, and your process, and documenting your process along the way. That's what the portfolio's about, documenting your development," Porter said. "Think of it almost like a science, your hypothesis, this is what I want to do and these are some things I'm interested in, and here's what happened along the way."

Some students enroll in the class in order to learn more about the history and structure of drawing.

"I think we're just gonna be more [focussed] on the structure of ... the different methods and probably looking more into the history of influential people rather than this year we focused a lot on elements and principles, so I guess this is more structured and less creative," sophomore Ella Mewees said.

At Acalanes, the majority of AP classes are STEM-based. The introduction of AP Drawing adds an AP to the Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) program and widens Acalanes' range of classes. High schools offering varied advanced courses that reflect different career paths, such as arts, can allow students to choose courses that interest them.

"I think [offering varied advanced courses] is important because everyone has their own interest, so if you wanna just follow something more in-depth, I think it's important that everyone has the opportunity to do that in their own way," Mewees said.

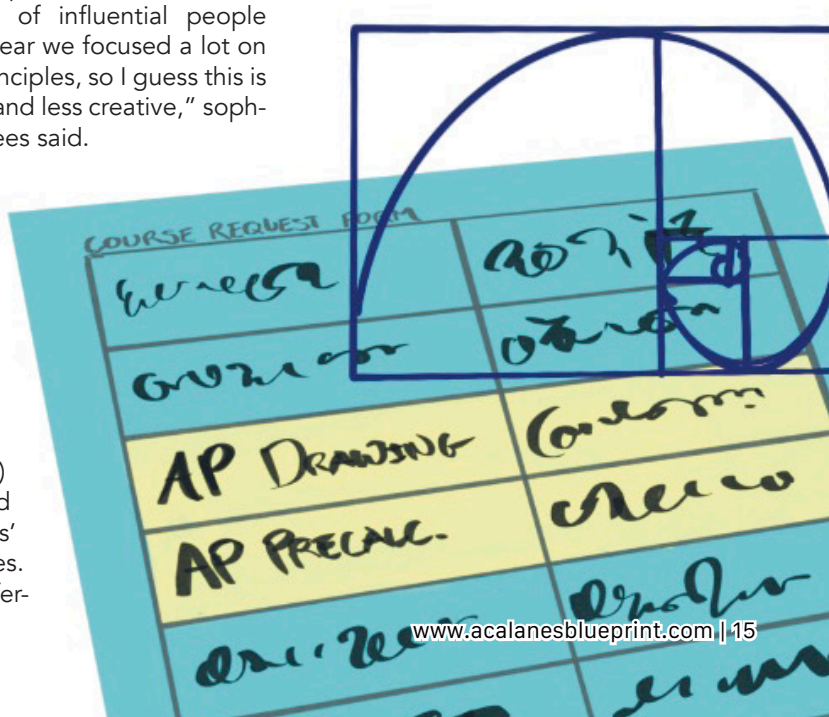
The addition of AP drawing creates an opportunity for students to take a different art class at Acalanes, both to improve their artistic skills and to express themselves.

"I am taking AP Drawing next year, mainly because I want to get better at drawing and painting," sophomore Ruby Bogan said. "Having art classes in school is really important because it provides a creative outlet for students."

Offering AP Drawing class allows students to take an art class for all four years of high school, creating opportunities for them to explore and develop their artistic interests.

"I think that kids that take art, it's kind of like orchestra or drama, they tend to stay there because that's where their people are. I'm glad we still offer a four-year sequence for students that want to continue on and keep learning," Martin said.

Blueprint would like to acknowledge that Susan Martin is related to Audrey Martin, a member of* Blueprint *staff.



Presidential Policies in Schools

Breaking down President Trump's new education policies

Mika Katzenelson, Gwyneth Lee, and Sela Sarbiewski | Staff Writers

Graphic by Sof Cerruti

Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, one source chose to remain anonymous. They are quoted as anonymous Acalanes parent.

Throughout his initial campaign in 2024, President Trump promised a variety of changes to numerous branches of the government, from abolishing the Department of Education to removing federal grant funding for education that promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Since his inauguration on Jan. 20, 2025, President Donald Trump has signed over seven Executive Orders (EO), including several impacting education.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) states that an EO is a "written directive, signed by the president, that orders the government to take specific actions to ensure the laws be faithfully executed." Federal and state judges review EO to ensure their constitutionality, and by themselves they cannot override federal laws and statutes.

Supreme Court rulings have determined that presidents are not allowed to interfere with any institution Congress already funds, as this would be an unconstitutional limitation of legislative power. However, President Trump has proposed to abolish the U.S. Department of Education (ED), a federally funded administration, marking a discrepancy between the precedent of executive power and current executive action.

The removal of the ED would eliminate federal funding in public schools with low-income students. The ED provides federal funding in what is known as Title I money, which is based on the percentage of low-income students in relation to the whole student body.

When it comes to public education, California receives relatively smaller amounts of government funding in comparison to other states. Additionally, the Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) receives very little Title I money and therefore may feel the impact less.

"Funding is very complicated, and on average, schools in our state get maybe six to nine percent of their funding from federal funding," Advanced Placement Environmental Science and Health and Social Development teacher Jada Paniagua said.

Although the AUHSD may not feel the impact of funding cuts, research grants for projects related to DEI may feel impact across the state and locally at universities. Acalanes creates programs similar to DEI titled "diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging" (DEIB), but these efforts are not federally funded.

The ED stated in a press release on Feb. 17 that "it has terminated over $600 million in grants to institutions and nonprofits that were using taxpayer funds to train teachers and education agencies on divisive ideologies." When referencing divisive ideologies, the ED refers to DEI practices.

Many people have already started to feel the impact of these policies, specifically university staff experiencing funding and grant cuts. In some instances, these funding cuts are decided using lists of flagged words. Research papers that include trigger words flagged by the Trump administration such as "trans," "Black," and "women," may put some school's federally funded research grants at risk of being cut.

The ED also plans cutbacks for grant money including that for teacher preparation. This means that some teachers will receive fewer or no preparation periods and limited training time to improve their teaching.

"A friend of mine who is a faculty at [California State University (CSU)] Monterey Bay just announced that a $5.8 million grant on teacher preparation got canceled. That's a lot of teacher preparation that's not gonna happen and that's really concerning, especially because there's a teacher shortage right now," adjunct faculty member at CSU East Bay Diana Recouvreur said.

Curriculums that do not align with "patriotic education" may also face funding cuts. President Trump defines patriotic education as "a presentation of the history of America grounded in: an accurate, honest, unifying, inspiring, and ennobling characterization of America's founding and foundational principles ... [and] the concept that commitment to America's aspirations is beneficial and justified."

When teaching students about American history, some teachers believe it is as important to include the negative aspects of history as well as the good, which may not conform to federal standards for patriotic education.

"One of the things I say to my students all the time, especially in my [United States] history class is you need to love your country, warts and all ... You can't love everything about something ... You can't just look at the good this country

has done, you have to take the good with the bad," Human and Social Development and social sciences teacher *Brian Smith said.

The Trump administration plans to establish patriotic education by abolishing "radical indoctrination." In President Trump's EO 14190, titled "Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling," he plans to defund schools that portray America as "fundamentally racist, sexist or otherwise discriminatory."

Section Three, "Ending Indoctrination Strategy," also intends to remove funding for "illegal and discriminatory treatment and indoctrination in K-12 schools, including based on gender ideology and discriminatory equity ideology," within 90 days of Jan. 29, 2025, the date Trump signed the order.

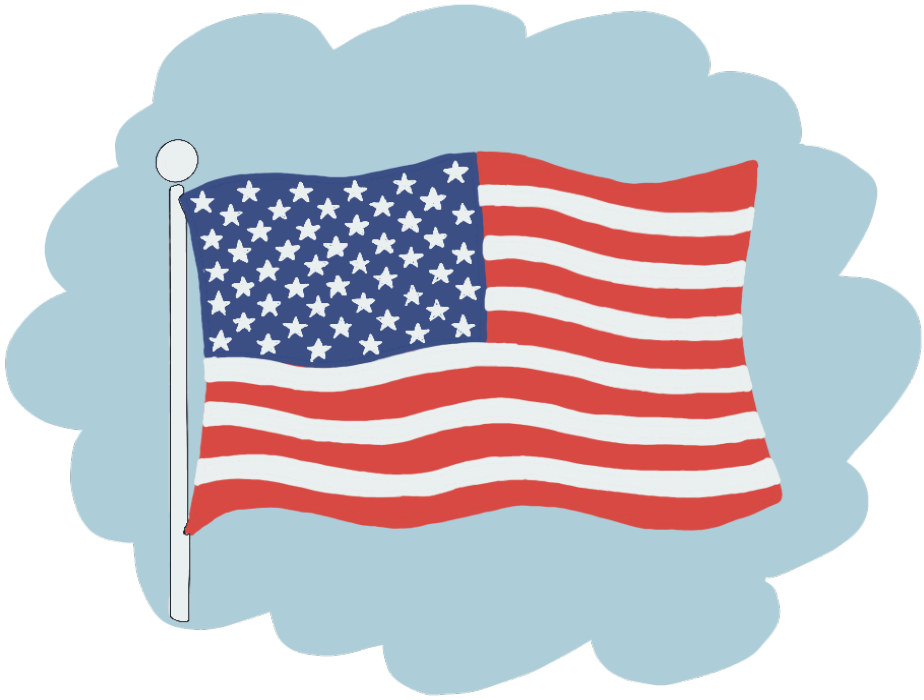
This EO aims to protect the rights of parents, stating that "parents trust America's schools to provide their children with a rigorous education and to instill a patriotic admiration. In recent years, however, parents have witnessed schools indoctrinate their children in radical, anti-American ideologies while deliberately blocking parental oversight."

Some parents agree that while DEI topics are important to cover in school, mandating them as new courses, such as Ethnic Studies, may not be beneficial to high school students.

"DEI related topics are important to provide a full picture but should not be added to the curriculum as stand-alone new individual semester [or] year-long course mandates. Adding more mandated classes is not helpful, especially in high school. There is plenty of opportunity to weave DEI related topics into existing standard curriculum, and it should be respectful and balanced," anonymous Acalanes parent said.

The order also reestablishes President Trump's 2020 "President's Advisory 1776 Commission" to promote patriotic education, which former President Joe Biden previously terminated in his EO 13985, "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government," on Jan. 20, 2021.

Furthermore, the EO states that the school environment forces students to "accept these ideologies without question or critical examination," and that "in many cases, innocent children are compelled to adopt identities as either victims or oppressors solely based on their skin color and other immutable characteristics."



Blueprint Graphic/Emily Roberts

Although the order aims to restrict federal funding for schools that promote "gender ideology" and "discriminatory equity ideology," as well as reinstating "patriotic education," the AUHSD will not be impacted, based on current California law.

"We look at the current California statute that tells us what to do ... The president put out a presidential order earlier this week but right now we're not obliged to follow the presidential order, we're obliged to follow California state law. Now California state law could change or there could be some act giving more authority and making California law illegal, so we're waiting on that," AUHSD Superintendent Dr. John Nickerson said.

Beyond funding changes, Trump has begun conducting Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids meant to investigate immigration violations. Currently, ICE agents are allowed to enter campus, but are not allowed to enter classrooms without a warrant. Schools are considered "sensitive locations," meaning that there are additional legal obligations for ICE.

"I don't think it's very likely that we will see immigration enforcement on campus; I think it's more of a scare tactic ... What I do worry about is students that are impacted by parents being the recipient of immigration enforcement," AUHSD Associate Superintendent Amy McNamara said.

Some agree that conversely, Californians may be more impacted by ICE outside of education. Parents of students and other community members could be affected by ICE raids, meaning that there may be impacts on students' lives.

"The real concern is for our students and the folks in their communities, and how broader increased ICE activity will impact their lives overall," Paniagua said.

AUHSD schools are only obligated to conform to these policy changes when they become state law. Until then, the school will focus on providing a safe learning environment and ensuring that students receive the necessary support and resources for their education.

"We are responding by affirming our commitment to being a school that is inclusive and supportive of all students who belong here and that we believe that we can take care of and support our students with the appropriate education that we know is desired by our community, as approved by our school board, and that is approved by our state," Acalanes Principal Eric Shawn said.

***Blueprint** would like to acknowledge that *Brian Smith is related to Sof Cerruti, a member of* **Blueprint** staff.*

A New Space Race: The Fight for AI Supremacy

China's DeepSeek shocks the U.S. and raises questions about the future of American AI innovation

Jake Colaco | Head Section Editor

Spread by Bo Chevaleau

Beginning with the launch of Sputnik in 1957, the United States and Soviet Union raced for space supremacy. Although the Soviets made the first achievement, President Kennedy, NASA, and the American people continued their efforts. On July 20, 1969, American Apollo 11 successfully landed on the moon. Today, a new race has just begun, this time with China, and the stakes are just as high.

Currently, the top seven U.S. companies, by market capitalization, are considered technology companies. All seven companies in the "Magnificent Seven" are involved in Artificial Intelligence (AI) in some capacity.

AI is computer systems that can operate without requiring human intelligence. OpenAI released one of the most commonly used AI models, ChatGPT, in November 2022. Although OpenAI was initially founded as a nonprofit organization seeking to develop AI that benefits society, they are now a for-profit company bringing in billions of dollars of revenue each year. OpenAI has used capital acquired through subscriptions and a $13 billion investment from Microsoft to become an AI powerhouse with improved learning capabilities, rapid response times, and a human-like understanding of conversational language.

On Jan. 10, 2025, China shook the American market with its own AI model, DeepSeek, which was developed rapidly and for just $6 million, a fraction of what it took to create ChatGPT. DeepSeek's release caused the Nasdaq, a tech-weighted index, to drop three percent overnight. A significant cause of this drop was when Nvidia, an American multinational corporation and technology company, had a record-setting $560 billion loss of market capitalization after DeepSeek's release.

Nvidia's significance lies in its high-end AI chips, which cost up to $40,000 per chip. Large AI models like ChatGPT run on thousands of AI chips, primarily those produced by Nvidia, which controls between 70 and 95 percent of the chip market. DeepSeek's release prompts the question of whether these high-end chips are needed to make advanced AI models.

America's superiority in the AI race lies in its semiconductor manufacturing, primarily by Nvidia. Now, millions of investors are uncertain about the future of AI and whether or not large technology companies can continue generating record highs in the market. Investor sentiment largely fuels market trends, and historically, uncertainty in the market has caused periodical downturns. However, others believe competition benefits American technology companies by encouraging innovation and further growth.

China's ability to rival American AI infrastructure is largely due to AI's status in China as a national security and economic growth strategy. Unlike the U.S., where private companies drive AI development, China's government has centralized its AI race. Therefore, AI companies in China have ample funding on top of mandated integration across industries.

DeepSeek's rapid development and incredibly low cost indicate that Chinese companies could use different AI approaches than American companies. Although China has not revealed many specifics regarding DeepSeek's production, many speculate that its access to a wide array of data and advanced quantum computing research has allowed it to keep up with American AI.

Chinese AI companies have a more long-term view of developing sustainable AI innovations than U.S. AI companies. Additionally, unlike America, China has strict regulations restricting American companies from accessing its market. This allows Chinese AI models to train on untapped datasets without interference.

Although much of Wall Street sees DeepSeek as a temporary market interruption, it could have more significant implications, including reshaping global technology leadership. If China can continue producing competitive AI models at a fraction of the cost while developing for eventual dominance, American firms may face increasing pressure and competition. This sentiment is a significant reason many investors believe in the imminent pop of the current technology "bubble."

This competition with China has many implications for American society and the economy. The main reason for the inflated valuations of the Magnificent Seven is expected growth. These companies could take significant hits without achieving significant growth quarter over quarter, which encourages rapid development and prioritizes short-term revenue beats instead of long-term sustainability. Rushed AI development poses substantial concerns, including data privacy, cybersecurity, and military strength.

To maintain America's dominant AI position, federal implementations of development policies could become a reality. These policies would allow American AI companies to focus on conducting necessary research without fear of losing an advantage to foreign competition.

Ultimately, the U.S. must act swiftly and intentionally to maintain its AI leadership. Although private companies have led AI innovation in the past, the Trump Administration has demonstrated a emphasis on ramping up innovation as quickly as possible. President Trump's $500 billion investment in AI infrastructure allows companies to invest in quantum computing, energy efficiency, and advanced AI models. His immediate involvement in AI development, plus the promotion of technology billionaire Elon Musk to the head of the Department of Government Efficiency, indicates AI will be heavily prioritized for the next four years.

Can the U.S. remain the dominant AI entity forever and control its rapidly developing and infinitely important market, or will it become the Sputnik of the race and prove insignificant to China? America's economic future relies heavily on this race, which is just beginning.

Connelly's Corner: Tariff Tensions

Exploring the impacts of new tariffs on foreign imported goods

Molly Connelly | Print Feature Editor

Spread by Bo Chevaleau

When someone approaches a cash register, they anticipate leaving a little extra aside for the sales tax on top of their purchase. What most people do not think about are the extra taxes that they do not see – tariffs. Rising prices have become an unavoidable reality, whether at the grocery store, in the tech aisle, or across industries dependent on global trade.

While inflation is often cited as the primary cause, tariffs play a role in rising prices. These taxes on imported goods shape the cost of everyday items, influence business decisions, and impact local economies in ways that are not always immediately visible. Far from being just a policy tool or a geopolitical bargaining chip, tariffs have tangible consequences for consumers and industries alike.

Throughout President Trump's first month in office, he has unveiled a variety of tariffs on Mexico, Canada and China. The White House released these tariffs under the idea that there is "an emergency situation" and "the extraordinary threat posed by illegal aliens and drugs, including deadly fentanyl, constitutes a national emergency under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA)."

The White House press release stated that "until the crisis is alleviated, President Donald J. Trump is implementing a 25 [percent] additional tariff on imports from Canada and Mexico and a ten [percent] additional tariff on imports from China. Energy resources from Canada will have a lower ten [percent] tariff."

On Feb. 3, President Trump engaged in negotiations with both Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum about these tariffs and agreed to halt the tariffs for one month so that each nation could examine potential policy goals and economic impacts, without those impacts being felt on the economy right away. However, the tariffs on Chinese imports remain ongoing.

President Trump appears to hope that these tariffs will force these foreign governments to aid the U.S. in preventing immigration and illegal drugs such as fentanyl from entering the U.S. However, these proposals are now also extending beyond immigration and drug control.

President Trump's recent proposal to impose a 25 percent tariff on imported automobiles, semiconductors, and pharmaceuticals has ignited a debate over the potential economic repercussions for American consumers. While the administration argues that these measures will protect domestic industries and enhance national security, critics warn that such tariffs could lead to increased consumer prices, inflationary pressures, and strained international relations.

Tariffs function as taxes on imported goods, and importers often pass these additional costs onto consumers. For instance, a 25 percent tariff on imported vehicles could significantly raise car prices for American buyers. Similarly, tariffs on semiconductors and pharmaceuticals may lead to higher costs for electronics and medications, respectively.

The introduction of new tariffs can contribute to inflation by increasing the prices of imported goods and services. Such inflationary effects could prompt the Federal Reserve to adjust monetary policy, potentially maintaining or even raising interest rates to counteract rising prices. This scenario could negate the intended economic stimulus of lower interest rates, adding some complication to this policy debate.

Currently, President Trump has proposed tariffs on over $1.4 trillion worth of consumer goods. Many argued that President Trump had a similar philosophy around tariffs during his first term, and that these tariffs did not inherently lead to inflation. However, according to the *Tax Foundation*, only $380 billion worth of consumer goods were impacted, roughly one-third of what President Trump has begun to enact, meaning that the scale of these tariffs will change.

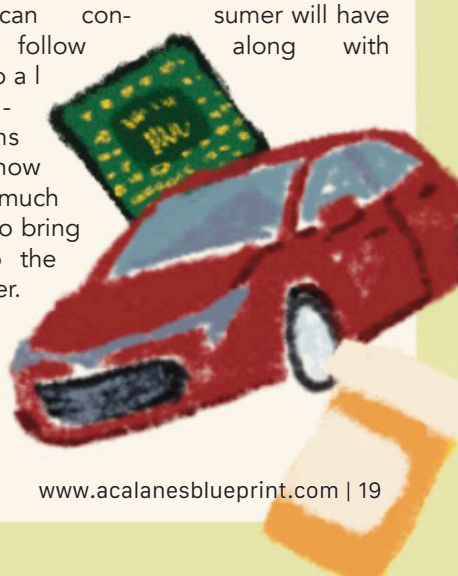
During President Trump's first term, he focused tariffs away from where the consumer would feel their impacts such as industrial products. The goal in doing so was to mitigate and delay the impacts the tariffs had on consumer prices.

This time, President Trump has focused on common consumer goods such as toys, which were not included in the tariffs during his first term. China currently produces 70 percent of the world's toys. CEO of Basic Fun Jay Foreman stated that a toy truck that currently costs $30 will likely rise to $40 by the end of the year due to tariffs.

President Trump has also discussed a worldwide tariff of ten to 20 percent, meaning that companies will not be able to move their production to another country to avoid the tariffs. This could also trigger retaliatory tariffs from other nations that could lead to a trade war.

China, Mexico, and Canada all responded to President Trump's tariffs with tariffs of their own. China imposed both ten and 15 percent tariffs on a variety of American products. Canada imposed a 25 percent tariff on American imports including beverages, cosmetics, and paper products. Mexico has plans for 20 percent tariffs on various goods. Both countries halted any retaliatory tariffs until March 4, pending negotiations.

The American people have yet to feel the full impacts of potential tariffs. However, ongoing negotiations will determine whether drastic price increases for the consumer will become the new reality. At this point, it is unclear whether the policy goals for these tariffs will be effective in creating their desired outcome and the extent of their impact on the global economy. One thing is clear, the American consumer will have to follow along with global negotiations to know how much cash to bring up to the register.



Dealing With Discrimination

Updates to hate speech policy across the school district

Zinnia Khan, Neve Murphy, Maddie Obertello, and Natalie Pecci | DEIB Director, Print Opinion Editor, and Staff Writers

Spread by Bo Chevaleau and Emily Roberts

In response to growing concerns surrounding the use of discriminatory language among students, the Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) updated its policy to define and reinforce hate speech rules and repercussions to promote a safe and respectful environment.

The AUHSD has always had policies regarding hate speech on campus, detailed in the AUHSD Student Handbook. These policies are district-wide and each school site is individually responsible for informing students of the rules and ensuring that they respect them.

Most policies in the handbook are dictated by the California Education Code, a set of laws that govern California public schools. In light of recent incidents of hate speech on AUHSD campuses, the District has made renewed efforts to ensure that these protocols are followed uniformly and effectively.

The new protocol for the 2024-2025 school year goes into more depth on specific disciplinary actions to take in response to hate speech. The updates set up a system of three referrals, each corresponding to a further degree of repercussion. These policy changes originated in the Acalanes Parent Club (APC) Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Committee, where parents from across the District collaborated to send a policy change request to the AUHSD.

"The AUHSD student handbook needed an update because students did not have a clear understanding of what was acceptable and what could get them into trouble. There were vague descriptions but no solid examples and administrators had difficulty matching the guidelines to the behaviors as well. Parents were feeling as though they were not being heard when they saw different students receiving different disciplines," APC DEIB Committee Member Nicole Long said.

Despite existing policies, AUHSD students continued to witness and experience incidents of hate speech and discrimination. One incident of hate speech occurred during a women's junior varsity (JV) basketball game. An opposing team began yelling harmful comments at several of the women on the Acalanes team. After the game, many players reflected on how the language affected them.

"[A] comment was directed at me and my sister. It [felt] hurtful. Words do hurt," JV women's basketball player and sophomore Asha Sekhon said.

The Acalanes coaches and administration were responsive following the incident and made an effort to prevent the continuation of behavior like this.

"Our coaches and Acalanes were very supportive. They were very against what happened and were very supportive of [my] teammates. They were like 'We're so sorry this happened and we'll work here'... They tried to make it very clear that they were not okay with [that] behavior. During practice, there was a whole meeting about it too," Sekhon said.

Incidents including this one elicited concerns from parents in the community, many of which were already heavily involved in matters of DEIB on campus. These concerns pushed school sites to clarify their policies through presentations and other reforms.

"The presentations that we gave were the result of collaboration between district-wide parent groups from the different parent clubs on campus in our district ... [We wanted] it to feel like a campaign where we're making it very clear and again transparent of how our school district and all the schools in our district respond to accept hate or speech that is hateful or hurtful," Acalanes Principal Eric Shawn said.

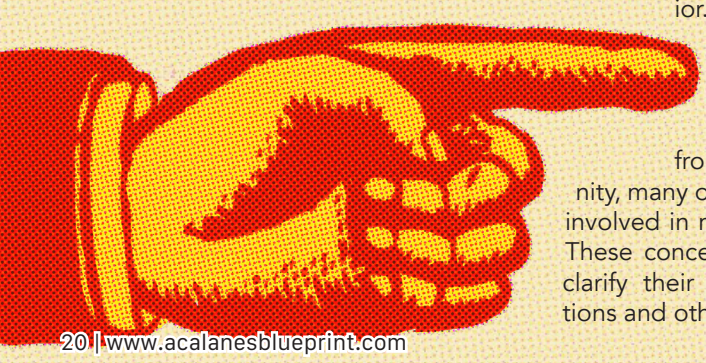
Pressure from local parents and increased attention to such incidents prompted the District to strengthen its implementation of hate speech policies.

"Through my work on the APC board as VP Community Partners, I have been able to work closely with our Campus Culture Committee parents to think through these difficulties and bring a cohesive plan to our school board and administration. The Board and administrators were very receptive and worked with us in committee meetings to make a practical guide for all students, families, and staff. We are hopeful that the new guidelines will make for a more cohesive policy of fairness in disciplinary actions and allow for more restorative practices for all of those involved," Long said.

Principals from all four AUHSD schools, superintendents, and parents met to discuss where the District struggled to uphold its policies and what improvements needed to be made.

"[Parents and AUHSD] started looking at some other districts and the policies they have ... We have to follow the [education] code so in some ways, the policy hasn't really changed at all, but [instead] how … we [are] explaining it in a way that makes sense to students, and how … we [are] providing the administrators with some guidance," Deputy Superintendent Amy McNamara said.

The main update to the handbook was more coherence surrounding the reper-

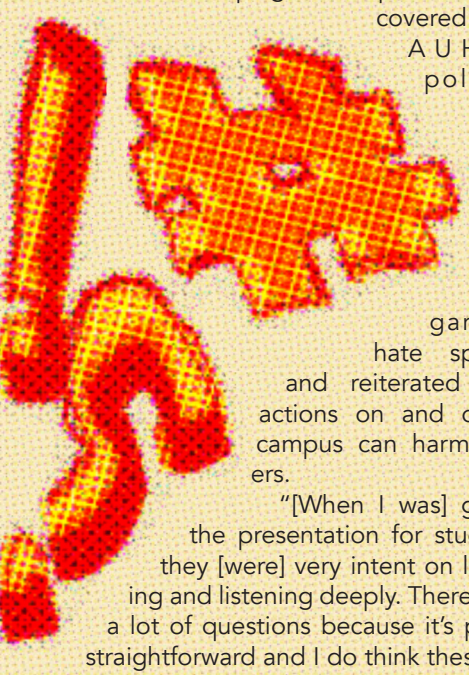


cussions for incidents of hate speech. There was also an effort to differentiate between the levels of harm of incidents on campus.

In order to reinforce their changes to the handbook, schools launched the No Hate Zone campaign in January and February 2025. The campaign used classroom presentations, posters across campuses, information about the updated student handbook, and community-wide communication.

"This initiative aims to foster a more inclusive and respectful school environment, ensuring that all students understand their role in creating a culture of belonging," AUHSD DEIB Coordinator Rania El-Sioufi said.

To further student understanding of existing policies and the edits made to them, as well as the effects of hate speech, all AUHSD students received a presentation from administrators during their classes as a part of the No Hate Zone campaign. The presentations covered the AUHSD policies regarding hate speech and reiterated how actions on and off of campus can harm others.



"[When I was] giving the presentation for students they [were] very intent on listening and listening deeply. There's not a lot of questions because it's pretty straightforward and I do think these are things that most people on the surface really understand and get, but as I've left the room, I've seen students mouth to me, thank you," Shawn said.

Students have responded to the presentations they received in their classrooms in a mixed manner. Some appreciated them, citing the normalized nature of many harmful words used on campus.

"I think the presentation was needed, as many people do not think of what they are saying and the impact of it. It is good to remind people what behavior is bad because most of it is more normalized than it should be," sophomore Maria Tislenko said.

Students reported seeing repetitive issues on campus that they hoped the presentations would address, especially regarding the use of slurs.

"Kids around the school do need to change their behavior. Around schools I've heard the use of the f-slur to describe people or the casual use of the n-word by non-black students," frosh Jamie Chen-Lichman said.

On the policy side of the issue, many students embraced the opportunity to learn more about the changes made to the AUHSD Student Handbook.

"I liked hearing about the fact that they would be using the same language across schools in the district and generally have a set standard of how the policies should be enforced at our school," sophomore Nikhil Hunn said.

On the other hand, others felt that the presentations were lacking in breadth, worrying that they might have minimized impact on the community.

"I think to the students that are actually listening to the presentations it'll make an impact but, I feel like some students [will not] take it as a request or anything. They're just like 'Okay this [person] said something, I literally could not care less,' and they just keep on saying it," Sekhon said.

Some also brought up the idea that prejudice exists on a large scale on campus, beyond incidents of blatant aggression.

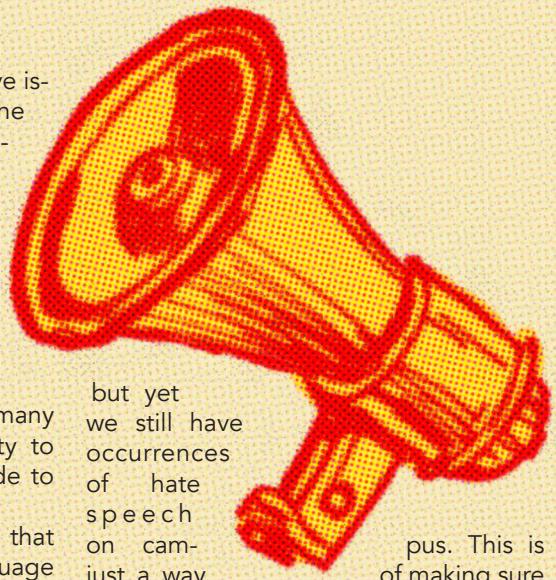
"I think this school's students are a lot more prone to microaggressions and more casual forms of hate speech. A student is more likely to make annoying comments about my voice or intentionally misgender me than they are to yell a slur at me," senior N Embleton said.

The district believes that in order to actualize their policy changes, every person on campus must be involved.

"Students are the true drivers of change in school culture. Staff members have also shown their support by displaying campaign posters throughout schools and classrooms. This initiative is a collective effort, and lasting change will only happen when we all come together to make our schools places where hate has no home," El-Sioufi said.

The main goals of these reforms and presentations are to further understand and establish the consequences one could face as a result of their actions.

"We know that students know better, but yet we still have occurrences of hate speech on campus. This is just a way of making sure that everyone knows the rules," Acalanes Associate Principal Jeanne Johnson said.



The AUHSD hopes to extend this campaign to the Lafayette School District (LAFSD) and other middle and elementary school districts to establish positive behaviors and interactions early on that will be reinforced by AUHSD policies.

"We are trying to work with our middle schools and elementary schools because kids don't come here and all of a sudden start using racial slurs, those are learned things that get tried on in elementary and middle schools. We are trying to engage our partner districts," McNamara said.

"This initiative aims to foster a more inclusive and respectful school environment, ensuring that all students understand their role in creating a culture of belonging," AUHSD DEIB Coordinator Rania El-Sioufi said.

One organization that is working to educate younger students is the UMBRELLA Committee, a volunteer organization former Acalanes student Melina Nath started in 2020, is dedicated to expanding education of inclusiveness to elementary and middle schools. The organization is currently run by Lamorinda high school students.

"The UMBRELLA Committee is a group of people and we present to the elemen

tary schools and Stanley about equality and inclusion [at school] and how you incorporate that into your [daily] life ... We present about different things. Last year we presented on microaggressions to Stanley, and we talked about how you can see microaggressions and how you can change the way you talk about things and how to be mindful of other people," UMBRELLA Committee Head of Communications and junior Victoria Hiatt said.

The UMBRELLA Committee strives to educate younger kids as they recognize the importance of having awareness of the effects of your words.

"I think the reason we give presentations to younger kids is because high school students tend to not want to listen, especially when it's in a school setting. I think it's hard to do it from the perspective of teachers presenting to students because teachers have the respect of a lot of students but not all not them. I think the younger students are a lot more attentive to what we are saying than the high school students are," Hiatt said.

During troubling and confusing times for some, the AUHSD is emphasizing the importance of belonging for all.

"In the climate around the election, ... we're also concerned that we want to make sure students really understand school should be a place where everybody can go, regardless of their political beliefs, and just feel safe," McNamara said.

One way in which the AUHSD attempts to ensure the safety of students on their campuses and abide by these regulations is through their Bias Incident Reporting System (BIRT). This is a district-wide system under which students can report incidents of bias or hatred through an online survey that connects them with their school's "BIRT Team." At Acalanes, the BIRT Team is composed of five Acalanes staff: social studies teacher Brian Smith, wellness coordinator Patrick Turner, school counselor Marissa Meadows, physical education teacher Mike Ivankovich, and Associate Principal Andrea Powers.

The AUHSD implemented BIRT in the Fall of 2020 to complement the disciplinary actions in the AUHSD Student Handbook. While the handbook focuses on disciplining the person who committed the hateful act, BIRT is aimed at supporting the victim of the incident. They prioritize education and meaningful conversations to improve the school environment.

"It is my job to take care of every single one of my students and to make sure that every one of my students feel safe, that every single one of my students is learning the information that is relevant and important and applicable for them to learn," AP Environmental science and Ethnic Studies teacher Jada Paniagua said.

"[The BIRT team works] to support the person who feels harmed. [They are] either the reporter or [someone] that has been reported as being harmed ... [The team] will work with that person in restorative practices," Johnson said.

BIRT also collaborates with staff and students to identify patterns and provide resources that help prevent future incidents. Through ongoing training and open dialogue, BIRT aims to equip students and staff with the tools to address bias in a constructive way.

"It's important to talk to [students and staff] and make sure they understand in a deeper [context] than just saying 'hey you shouldn't do that,' but have a bigger conversation about why [conversation] actually is so impactful," Smith said.

Along with the changes to guidelines regarding hate speech, BIRT also was updated to better suit the needs of students.

"We set the system to really protect privacy ... when you're addressing a student about an anonymous report, it's really hard. It kind of leads to nowhere. So we took out the anonymous reporting. It's not helpful for us because we can't support the person who was harmed. We were also getting a lot of ridiculous reports, to be really honest with you," Deputy Superintendent Amy McNamara said.

The changes require students to provide identifiable information when submitting reports, ensuring more effective follow-up and accountability.

"I would say, actually the volume has come down, because I do think that's a barrier to kids reporting everything, but the quality of the reports has gone up. We're more able to intervene," McNamara said.

Contrary to the AUHSD's efforts to expand DEIB programs and support, the Trump administration has restricted diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs on a national level. On Jan. 20 2025, President Trump signed an executive order disbanding all DEI programs. However, this will have little effect on the policies of public schools as most aspects of education are dictated by the state government and not the federal government. The main restrictions the federal government has on public schools come through their ability to restrict funding.

"It is my job to take care of every single one of my students and to make sure that every one of my students feel safe, that every single one of my students is learning the information that is relevant and important and applicable for them to learn. The curriculum that I teach in all of my classes helps to do that. So, until people make me stop, I have no plans to stop," Advanced Placement Environmental science and Ethnic Studies teacher Jada Paniagua said.

The AUHSD intends to continue prioritizing anti-hatred policy despite national-level changes, ensuring inclusivity and understanding on campuses.

"[We are] working to promote that school is the one place where all kids feel safe and that we should come here with a variety of different beliefs and opinions and religions and still be able to coexist peacefully without harming each other. That's really the goal, ultimately, to create a learning environment where ... kids understand that they have to be mindful of what they say, so it doesn't hurt people," McNamara said.

Local Government Briefs

Shiraz Kamran and Mika Katznelson | Staff Writers

City Council

The Lafayette City Council held its bimonthly meetings on Feb. 10 and Feb. 24. The public can access the meeting's minutes, agenda, and audio on the City of Lafayette website, and the Council posts a livestream of each meeting on the City of Lafayette's Youtube channel. Community members can also join the meeting virtually on Zoom through the city website. For the February meetings, the council opened with a closed session followed by public comments.

During the Feb. 10 meeting, the Lafayette City Council first addressed emergency preparedness, naming Andy Kley, a 15-year veteran of emergency services, as the city's new emergency coordinator and going over evacuation plans.

Additionally, they discussed the changes to Measure H, infrastructure tax, and how a citizen advisory committee will be formed by August or September to oversee how the collected funds are used.

At the Feb. 24 meeting, Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) Director Matthew Ren updated on the installation of new fare gates at the Lafayette BART station.

They then discussed the Public Art Committee's report, which created new initiatives to create a digital map of the city's public art collection with QR-coded plaques for public art installations to provide the artist and historical information. They also planned for a mural downtown and a new installation of "Dandelion" public art.

Later, they discussed and added insurance reform under emergency preparedness, with focus areas in e-commerce tax redistribution and emergency funding for wildfires.

Finally, at both meetings, the City Council reviewed plans to consider selling city-owned land at 949 Moraga Road in Lafayette to Sunflower Hill and Satellite Affordable Housing Associates (SAHA) for affordable housing specifically for adults with disabilities, which the board unanimously supported and will move forward if the project secures state funding.

Governing Board

The Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) Governing Board met on Feb. 5 and Feb. 19. The AUHSD website contains recordings of all the meetings which are viewable for the public. The meeting opened with a closed session followed by a public session, and then a report from Acalanes Education Association (AEA) President Lori Tewksbury on campus events.

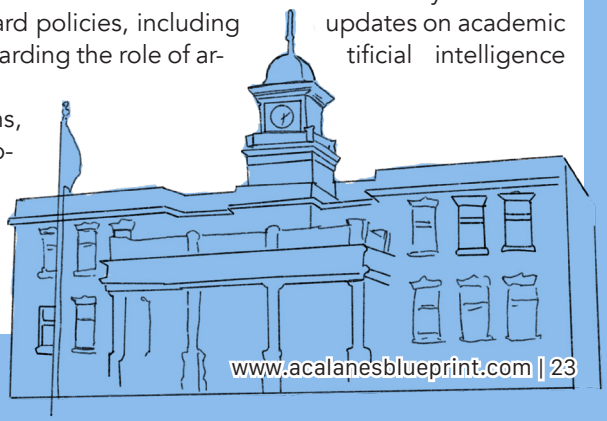
During the Feb. 5 meeting, student representatives from each school reported on their campuses' activities, highlighting events like upcoming spring sports, academic competitions, and community service projects.

The Governing Board adopted a resolution recognizing February as Black History Month, celebrating the contributions and culture of Black Americans within the AUHSD, and adopted Resolution 24-25-10, proclaiming March as Women's History Month to emphasize the achievements of women throughout history. Lastly, the Board approved the annual budget report, outlining the district's financial planning and resource allocation for the upcoming fiscal year.

In the second of its bimonthly meetings, the Governing Board adopted a resolution recognizing and honoring May as Jewish American Heritage Month, acknowledging the contributions of Jewish Americans to the AUHSD community.

In addition, the Board discussed and approved revisions to multiple board policies, including updates on academic honesty, student use of technology, and homework policies, particularly regarding the role of artificial intelligence in education.

The Board also approved the AUHSD Comprehensive School Safety Plans, which outline emergency response procedures and safety goals for the upcoming school year. Additionally, they reviewed the Local Control and Accountability Plan development process for 2025-2026, emphasizing community input in setting academic and extracurricular priorities.



The Value of Valengrams

How Acalanes spread joy this Valentine's Day season

Jenna Kessler, Cameron Powell, and Tselmeg Orgilmunkh | Business Manager, Online Editor-in-Chief, and Staff Writer

Graphic by Cade McAlister and Nico Roig

As florists and chocolate makers across the country prepared to supply people with these Valentine's Day treats, Acalanes also arranged to celebrate the holiday with their own unique traditions.

Student-led a cappella groups and Leadership delivered singing grams and candy-filled goodie bags to spread cheer on Feb. 13. Gift givers, singers, and organizers aimed to increase school spirit and strengthen the sense of community at Acalanes.

Acalanes' a cappella groups performed singing grams during first, third, and seventh period classes. The three groups were Harmonix, Octet, and STAB, a quartet named after the first letter of each member's first names. Harmonix leaders chose "Valentine" by Laufey and "All of Me" by John Legend, Octet sang "If I Ain't Got You" by Alicia Keys and "My Love Mine All Mine" by Mitski, and STAB performed "Goodnight Sweetheart" by The Spaniels and "Longest Time" by Billy Joel.

Students purchased singing grams for peers and some teachers. Many choose to provide a message to give to the recipient along with the performance.

"You can make the gram anonymous if you would like, and you can even leave a fun message for the person receiving the gram, which will be read out loud in front of the class. [The] grams are five dollars each," Harmonix and STAB member and senior Bee Reinsberg said.

Each group of singers participated in organized practices in advance of their performances. During rehearsals, leaders and gram deliverers considered past responses to singing grams to guide their preparation for these performances, focusing specifically on the pace of the songs.

"I think what makes a good gram is something that's fast-paced and fun so that you don't drag it on for too long ... something that's fun to look at, hear, and experience with friends in class. It's fun for people to get a minute break from their classes to have a good laugh or smile, surrounded by people they know," STAB member and junior Sean McNeil said.

Singers aimed to make the grams fun amidst a time when many students faced increased academic pressure.

"I think it really is just something to lighten the mood, especially second semester, it's a lot harder than first semester and I think it's great to acknowledge that there are holidays coming up and that we're celebrating these things even when school is kind of hard," Octet member and junior Rena Liu said.

Some a cappella members encourage students to join the Acalanes performing arts programs through the grams.

"By performing grams, we hope to bring some fun to the Acalanes campus, encourage a love of music, as well as encourage people to look into a cappella," Reinsberg said. "I think grams provide a great way for people to connect with each other, and it also serves as a fun, entertaining way for people to learn more about the different a cappella groups at Acalanes, as well as the visual and performing arts on campus as a whole."

Sometimes friends purchase singing grams for one another with the purpose of lighthearted embarrassment.

"I got a [singing] gram in my third and seventh [period classes]. It's pretty embarrassing, which is why me and my friend send them to each other with notes. I think they help spread holiday spirit and are overall really fun," junior Lauren Foster said.

Many also feel that singing grams provides a way for students to show appreciation for each other.

"It's a really great tradition that we have because it's not just embarrassing people, it's also nice to be recognized even if it's by your friends and even if you're being embarrassed," Liu said.

In addition to singing grams, Leadership students organized separate Valentine's Day gram distribution: festive bags of candy. Candy gram organizers, like the a capella groups, aimed to bring the student body together.

"I hope to achieve a warmer, inclusive environment in our school that is full of love, where people feel closer to each other and connected," Frosh Vice President Yelyzaveta Smerechuk said.

Some recipients of Leadership's candy gram expressed appreciation for the treats.

"It was nice to receive it, it made me feel good because I love my mom. I think it was a nice thing to add to the community because it was a good way for people to show their appreciation," frosh Olivia Kemp said.

For many, Valentine's Day grams are a way to connect with people important to them and demonstrate appreciation for one another.

"The importance [of the grams] is that people in our school get the opportunity to spread love and kindness to others, including their friends, or maybe peers they want to get closer with or somebody super important to them," Smerechuk said.

All-Star Joins All-State Band

California All-State Jazz Band welcomes Nathan Joseph

Saaj Shah and Cypress Reid | Online Editor and Staff Writer

Contributing photo by Mika Watanabe

A melody dampens the keys of a pristine piano. A pair of trumpets sing in harmony supported by the heavy thrum of a guitar. As the notes of a saxophone drift upon the breeze, a renowned state band works through another rehearsal. This year, the band finds itself in the company of a familiar face around the Acalanes campus.

Senior Nathan Joseph, a musician from Acalanes High School earned a spot in the California All-State Jazz Band, placing him among the state's top high school musicians. After years in the Acalanes Jazz Band, Nathan Joseph will now represent Acalanes for the wider state.

Every year, members of the California Alliance for Jazz select top-performing musicians from schools across the state.

"California All-State Jazz Band is an elite ensemble made up of the top high school jazz musicians from across the state. It performs at the California All-State Music Education Conference (CASMEC) and is conducted by renowned jazz educators and performers," Acalanes Director of Instrumental Music Edwin Cordoba said.

With support from his parents, Nathan Joseph pursued a place as the band's sole pianist.

"We were excited that he got selected as the pianist for the California All-State Jazz Band. What a fun opportunity to jam with [California's] best jazz musicians," Melissa Joseph said.

California All-State Jazz Band members worked to perform for the CASMEC, displaying their work for audiences across the state. The California Alliance for Jazz (CAJ) provided feedback on their performance.

"We had our rehearsal and our performance over a weekend in January where we met each other for the first time, and then two days later we had our performance after ten plus hours of rehearsal," Nathan Joseph said.

Nathan Joseph's parents introduced him to music at an early age and helped him to develop a passion for the piano throughout his childhood.

"When Nathan was four years old, he started taking piano lessons with Ruth Rose, a concert pianist in Washington D.C. He still takes lessons from Ruth via Skype. Nathan discovered jazz piano when he joined Stanley Middle School's jazz band led by Bob Athayde," Melissa Joseph said.

As time has passed, Nathan Joseph demonstrated dedication to his musical career, playing tenor saxophone, jazz piano, and bass synthesizer throughout his time at Acalanes.

"Nathan is a very hard-working and organized musician and [a] person that cares about music. I think what makes Nathan so talented is how much he cares about his craft," senior Leo Wornick said.

Nathan Joseph caught the eye of the judges during the audition process for the California All-State Jazz Band.

"Students audition by submitting a recorded audition, typically including prepared etudes, scales, and an improvisation segment over a given chord progression. Selection is highly competitive, with judges evaluating tone, technique, style, and musicality," Cordoba said.

Despite the challenging song and improvisation portion of the audition, the program accepted Nathan Joseph.

"I'm really glad that Mr. Cordoba encouraged me to [apply] this year because I was thinking about not even auditioning since I didn't get in the last two years. I ended up [applying], and I'm really glad that I did. I think we have a really great program at Acalanes with a lot of great opportunities for performance, and for [people] to get better at lots of different parts of music," Nathan Joseph said.

On Jan. 18, Nathan Joseph played with the California All-State Jazz Band at the California All-State Music Education Conference convention.

"Nathan did a terrific job supporting the band from the piano chair. He had a strong concept of the role of a pianist playing in a big band, and also was able to help create interactive small group moments for soloists within a chart," President of the California Alliance for Jazz and California State University Northridge Associate Professor and Director of Jazz Studies Tina Raymond said.

Outside his abilities as a California All-State Jazz Band member, many admire Joseph for his attitude and work ethic.

"I am, on the daily, taken aback by his fluent and intuitive understanding of jazz harmony. Above all else, Nathan is a humble and confident person with an incredible amount of [esprit] de corps, always prioritizing and thinking about the group at large," Cordoba said.

Arman Craig, Business and Community Outreach member, contributed an interview.

Book Nook

Highlighting Black authors and literature

Spread by Audrey Martin

***Kansas City Lightning: The Rise and Times of Charlie Parker* by Stanley Crouch**
Molly Jones | Print Photo Story Editor

"His silent costars are the ghosts of jazz, living or dead, remembered exactly or partially or imaginatively. Most of all, he is alone, as he had always been."

Stanley Crouch's *Kansas City Lightning: The Rise and Times of Charlie Parker* is a biography following the Life of Charlie Parker, a well-known jazz Saxophonist and composer. The novel details Parker's early life and the chaos of Kansas City in the 1930s. It is just as much a book of cultural history as a biography, often veering into tangential historical material.

Despite a quick rise to fame within the jazz world, Parker's life was ultimately defined by the same thing that has claimed the lives of many musicians, a drug addiction that led to his death at only 34. Crouch's novel focuses on Parker's early years and his rise to fame, there is an underlying sense of inevitability throughout, which gives way to an important message about Parker's life. This book would be a good read for those familiar with the music of Charlie Parker, jazz music, or the music world in general.

***The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas**
Aamena Shipchandler | Print News Editor

"What's the point of having a voice if you're gonna be silent in those moments you shouldn't be?"

Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give* is an emotional and gripping novel that follows Starr Carter, a Black teenager who witnesses the police shooting of her unarmed childhood friend Khalil. Throughout the novel, Starr struggles to find her voice as she navigates grief and media scrutiny as well as conflicting pressures fromthe wealthy, predominantly white prep school she attends and the underprivileged neighborhood she grew up in.

Released in 2017 amidst the growing Black Lives Matter movement, this book educates readers through its observations of racism, police brutality, and the power of one's voice. Making the story extremely timely and personal through real world issues, Thomas captures the duality of identity, activism, and the personal tolls of injustice to resonate with all readers.

Through Thomas's engaging and raw writing, *The Hate U Give* proves to have a massive cultural impact, with the book later being adapted into a film and continuing to advocate for racial injustices that remain prominent today.

***Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison**
Helena McGinley | Print News Copy Editor

"Now he knew why he loved her so. Without ever leaving the ground, she could fly"

Kristin Harmel's *The Book of Lost Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon* is a powerful novel that takes readers on a journey through the relationship between identity and history. The story follows Milkman Dead, a young Black man searching for meaning in his life while attempting to uncover his family's complicated past.

The book is set in 20th-century America but includes motifs of magical realism and folklore. There is rich symbolism throughout the story, making it clear that *Song of Solomon* is a social commentary on the importance of knowing where we come from to understand who we truly are. Full of complex topics like generational trauma, gender roles, and racism, Morrison's work is a challenging yet powerful read.

***Let Us Descend* by Jesmyn Ward**
Sydney Scovic | Staff Writer

"We are made of the things we endure, and the things we endure make us."

Jesmyn Ward's *Let Us Descend* is an impactful historical fiction novel told from the perspective of Annie, a young enslaved woman in the Antebellum South. The novel begins with Annie's arrival at a plantation after being captured and sold into slavery. She then must learn to survive the horrors and brutality she encounters as a young enslaved woman. Annie's mother dies early on in the novel, playing a significant role in her life. While on her brutal journey she encounters many spirits and supernatural lifeforms, attributes of her West African heritage.

Ward's work is an intimate exploration of one woman and a broader reflection on the collective suffering and resilience of enslaved people. It powerfully illustrates the scars of trauma that are passed down through generations and the enduring strength of those who experience unimaginable hardship.

The Counterpoint

Spread by Justin Rosenblatt

Noah Frankel | Staff Writer

Many fans consider Billie Eilish's album *Hit Me Hard and Soft* to have been unfairly snubbed at the Grammys, especially given its overwhelming streaming success compared to Beyoncé's *Cowboy Carter*. Eilish's song "Birds of a Feather" alone outperformed the entirety of *Cowboy Carter* in streams. After listening, it is clear that *Hit Me Hard and Soft* conveyed more emotion in its 43-minute playtime than Beyoncé's hour-and-18-minute album. The intricate songwriting explores the many different emotions that come with falling out of love with a narcissist and falling in love with a woman for the first time. When Eilish previously confirmed her bisexuality, it was all the press wanted to talk about, but in the album, it was on her terms. Through her songs "Lunch" and "Birds of a Feather" Eilish expresses her matter-of-fact sexuality in lines like "I bought you something rare/And I left it under ... Claire." The album sticks out among others with its honest and real emotion that listeners can connect to.

Despite the Recording Academy's structured voting process in which experts and Academy members determine the nominees and winners, the Grammys are often criticized for not reflecting public opinion or streaming numbers. This year's results fueled speculation, particularly online, where some social media users suggested that Beyoncé's husband, Jay-Z, may have influenced the outcome. Comments telling Beyoncé to "act surprised" when receiving the Grammy and jokes like, "'I paid a lot for this' - Jay-Z" circulated on platforms like TikTok and Instagram.

While some accept that awards can go to artists beyond mainstream favorites like Eilish and Taylor Swift, many still believe Eilish was unfairly robbed of both Song of the Year and Album of the Year, and I agree with this. Eilish received seven nominations, yet not a single Grammy. Over five years, she has won nine awards, her most notable year being 2020 when she won five Grammys. These include what is known as the "Big Four" (Album of the Year, Record of the Year, Song of the Year, and Best New Artist). Based on her tearing up after Beyoncé won album of the year, some may think that Eilish was heartbroken that she had not won after working so hard on her album. However, past reactions to achievements say otherwise. After winning in previous years, she said, "Can I just say I think Ariana deserves this?" and "Damn, that's stupid guys." Her tears were a mix of sadness for her loss and admiration for seeing someone she looked up to succeed. It is only human to feel sad after a loss, but I do not think she was heartbroken. During the Grammys, Eilish was delighted to hug Beyoncé, giddy with joy, which shows the true esteem she has for her.

Gwyneth Lee | Staff Writer

The Grammys always have one argument or another following the announcement of the awards, and since the night of this year's Grammys, the only recurring protest I've heard of has been about Beyoncé winning Album of the Year. I was surprised to hear it too. I had barely even heard songs from *Cowboy Carter,* whereas Billie Eilish's *Hit Me Hard and Soft* and Sabrina Carpenter's Short n' Sweet have been in the background of every other video in my feed since the summer. As it turned out, many fans were disappointed by this outcome. Some even went as far as to accuse the Academy of cheating other albums, such as *Hit Me Hard and Soft*, out of a supposedly deserving win. However, after looking at the album's meaning and why fans are upset, I have realized that fans have unjustly criticized Beyoncé's win for Album of the Year. Beyoncé's Cowboy Carter is boldly unconventional in the way that it makes a cultural statement, tells a universal story, and challenges what country music is, and without a doubt deserves to win.

Beyoncé makes several cultural references, spanning from the lyrics to the artists. I was pleasantly surprised to find that the album's second song was a cover of the 1968 Beatles' classic, "Blackbird." The song's inclusion seemed completely strange until I discovered the historical significance behind the song. Paul McCartney originally wrote it as a response to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement after meeting two members of the Little Rock Nine. The group contained some of the first students to desegregate at their high school after the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. Beyoncé took McCartney's tranquil guitar and revived it as a homage to Black country music taking flight.

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Rom Com Review

A review of the best romantic comedies

Notting Hill (1999)
Emily Roberts | Print Feature Editor

Notting Hill is a romantic comedy film starring Julia Roberts and Hugh Grant as Anna Scott, a famous Hollywood actress, and William Thacker, a bookshop owner in Notting Hill, London. William's life changes unexpectedly when Anna visits his travel bookshop one afternoon and, after a chance encounter involving a spilled orange juice, their spark is undeniable. After Anna incites William to her sister's house for dinner their relationship starts to bloom, despite William's dislike for the glamor of Anna's world.

When Anna's movie star boyfriend from America shows up unexpectedly, William leaves and for the next six months, with the help of his quirky and wholesome friends, attempts to date Anna yet to no avail.

Out of the blue, Anna falls back into his life when she shows up looking for a place to hide after a tabloid scandal. William gladly welcomes her back into his life, and their spark is reignited as they spend more time together. However, their happiness is short-lived when William's eccentric roommate, Spike, inadvertently tips off the media, prompting the paparazzi to swarm William's home. Feeling betrayed, Anna leaves abruptly, and slowly William begins to return to his normal life. But when he learns that Anna is back in town to film a new movie, William sets out to win her back, which leads to a heartfelt and romantic climax.

Notting Hill is a fun, feel-good romcom with a great cast filled with recognizable actors. While the ending can be considered predictable, the twists and turns of the plot feel unexpected and lead to laugh-out-loud moments. It is the perfect movie for a cozy night with friends, delivering feel-good moments, witty dialogue, and a satisfying love story that leaves you smiling.

Clueless (1995)
Olivia Silverstein | Staff Writer

Clueless is a classic romance starring Alicia Silverstone as Cher Horowitz, a wealthy, self-appointed "matchmaker" and queen bee. Cher and her Best friend Dionne Davenport, played by Stacey Dash, take on the task of giving the transfer student Tai Frasier a huge makeover. Meanwhile, her ex-stepbrother Josh Lucas, played by Paul Rudd, slowly bonds with her while staying at their home, and Josh comes to realize she's more than a vain socialite.

Over the course of their friendship, Tai develops feelings for Josh and Cher has to come to terms with the nagging feeling that she wants a relationship with him too. Cher continues her struggle with trying to maintain her relationship with Tai and her overwhelming feelings for Josh throughout the movie.

With themes of coming of age and friends to lovers, there is something for everyone in this timeless comedy. Cher's character development from a classic mean girl archetype to a more understanding and caring person along with the messages of inclusion and friendship make this movie such a great watch. While the plotline of Josh being Cher's ex-step-brother may be outdated, its themes and characters make *Clueless* a classic movie and a must-watch every February.

The Proposal (2009)
Grace Wolpert | Arts Copy Editor

The Proposal directed by Anne Fletcher, is the perfect light-hearted and comedic movie for a fun night at home. Sandra Bullock plays the main character Margaret Tate, flawlessly displaying the role of a stern boss at a publishing company in New York. Assistant to Margaret is Andrew Paxton played by Ryan Reynolds, who follows Margaret's every demand hoping he can publish his work one day.

When an immigration officer arrives at Colden Books Publishing Company, Margaret faces devastating news: her visa has expired. As a Canadian citizen who has not received her citizenship, she is not permitted to remain the boss of Colden's book, however, she has a dangerous idea. She informs the immigration officer that she is engaged to her assistant Andrew to avoid deportation. This plan includes significant consequences, if found guilty of fabricating a relationship, they would receive criminal charges.

To bond in preparation to pass a government interview required to confirm their relationship, Margaret and Andrew travel to Sitka, Alaska, Andrew's hometown, to celebrate his grandmother's birthday. Although tensions are high, the faux couple must learn to come together for their mutual benefit.

This trip is full of comedic banter and memorable events including other notable characters such as Betty White, Craig T. Nelson, Oscar Nuñez, and many more. This movie perfectly blends the vulnerability that comes with a relationship and the funny moments that strengthen a couple's bond. With an enemies-to-lovers storyline, this movie is sure to tug on some heartstrings and induce a good belly laugh.

How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days (2003)
Maya Stafford | Print Arts Editor

How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days is a romantic comedy starring Kate Hudson and Matthew McConaughey, following two ambitious young adults who enter

a relationship to advance their careers.

As a writer for *Women's Magazine Composure*, where she specializes in 'How To' articles, Andie Anderson, a hardworking, funny, and beautiful woman, wants more than just writing about superficial topics. To impress her boss, she schemes a plan for her next column: how to lose a guy in ten days. Andie plots to be clingy, needy, embarrassing, and crazy but she does not realize what she's getting herself into.

Ben Berry (or Benny Bear, as Andie likes to call him) is a passionate advertiser who makes a bet with his colleagues. If he, as the great salesman he is, can make a woman fall in love with him in ten days, he would head a pitch for a very important business account.

As their two initiatives clash, Ben must put up with Andie's increasingly annoying behavior for the ten days leading up to the publishing date and business dinner. This movie is not only hilarious with amazing side characters and acting, but the story also truly highlights love's ability to overcome all. Despite the couple having the wrong intentions for dating one another, their connection ultimately supersedes whatever professional aspirations they have. Overall, I would highly recommend this film for those wanting a heartwarming, humorous, and dramatic watch.

To All the Boys I've Loved Before (2018)

Cara Hamilton | Staff Writer

To All The Boys I've Loved Before is a breath of fresh air in the sea of cringey modern teen romcoms. Lana Condor plays the lead, Lara Jean, an average, quiet, and unpopular teenager who despite these qualities is still sure

of herself and has a strong personal style. In the movie, her younger sister, Kitty, sends out Lara's five secret letters addressed to her past crushes, including her older sister's and ex-best friend, Gen's, ex-boyfriend, Peter.

Peter, after being broken up with by Gen, proposes that he and Lara start fake dating to make her jealous. Things get complicated as Lara learns to navigate being a part of the popular crowd and her new love life. As events spiral, Peter and Lara also begin to develop real feelings for each other, which only serves to intensify the growing mayhem of their lives.

What separates this movie from other teen movies of the past 20 years is how real Lara and the other characters feel. She often makes decisions and choices that make sense for a teenager, and she feels like someone you know and can relate to. What is also refreshing is the connection between Lara and her family, which is wholesome and sweet.

The relationship between her and Peter follows the popular tropes of jock and nerd and fake dating but with a fresh take, creating a really fun dynamic between the two main characters. If you love relatable characters, feel-good movies, and playful relationships, *To All The Boys I've Loved Before* will certainly steal your heart.

The Counterpoint

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Furthermore, Beyoncé collaborates with multiple Black country artists, one of which is Linda Martell. Like "Blackbird," "The Linda Martell Show" contains a deeper meaning. Martell was the first Black female solo artist to perform at the Grand Ole Opry. However, after signing a deal, Martell realized her music would be released under the label "Plantation Records," she faced discrimination without support, and her career eventually ended. Including Martell was a way of honoring the women who defied both racial and gender stereotypes and contributed to representation across the country genre.

Most of the other artists *Cowboy Carter* features are either cornerstones of the Black Country community or up-and-coming artists. Each musician brings something unique to the album, such as Stevie Wonder's bewitching harmonics on Beyoncé's re-embodiment of Dolly Parton's "Jolene" transitioning into Shaboozey's extraordinary blend of rap and country in "Spaghetti." With every artist that's introduced, the album bends the definition of country.

Beyoncé uses her music to make a statement and shed light on experiences with discrimination. This album is not only a tribute to Black history, but also an opening to the future of country music.

Although many fans are and will continue to be, upset with the Academy's voting process and choice to ignore the number of streams each album got, that is no reason to blatantly dismiss the cultural significance of *Cowboy Carter*. Beyoncé created a strikingly unique and diverse album to drive cultural conversations through genre experimentation and consequently deserved to win.

RECIPE OF THE ISSUE

Churro Cinnamon Bites

Maddyx Bride | Head Copy Editor

This delicious twist on the classic churro makes a warm and sugary cinnamon treat that has all the comforting flavors in a chewy cookie bar form. Perfectly served warm for a cozy treat.

Batter
1 cup softened butter
1 cup white granulated sugar
1 cup packed brown sugar
2 eggs
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
2 and ¼ cups flour
½ tsp salt
1 tsp baking powder
1 and ½ tbsp cinnamon

Cinnamon Sugar Topping
¼ cup white granulated sugar
1 and ½ tbsp cinnamon

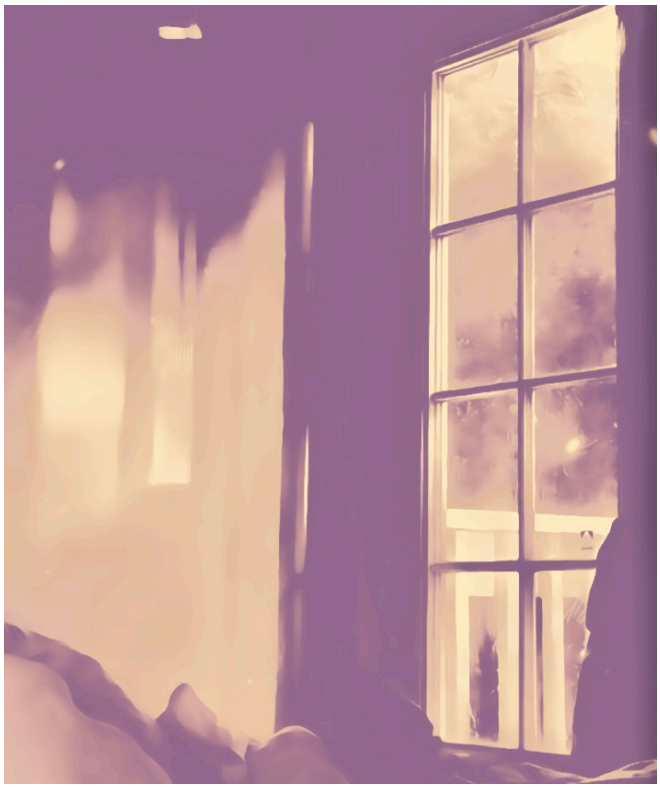
Instructions:
1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Grease a 9x13-inch baking dish and set aside.
3. Cream together butter and both sugars for two minutes.
4. Add in eggs, one at a time, vanilla, and cinnamon.
5. In a separate bowl, whisk together dry ingredients until combined.
6. Press dough into the baking dish into an even layer.
7. Sprinkle cinnamon sugar mixture on top.
8. Bake for 25 minutes (Note: it will still look a little raw).
9. Cool for 30 minutes.

BlueTunes

Olivia Foster and Zoe Stafford | Head Section Editor and *Azure* Editor-in- Chief

Though not all music fans were tuned into the Grammy Awards that took place on Feb. 2, many heard about the shocking and exciting twists and turns of the night. Every year, some fans celebrate the awarded artist while other watchers do not fully support the Academy's decision. However, there is no question that all nominated artists this year have showcased immense musical talent and accomplishment with their projects. Here are some of our favorite nominated songs from the 2025 Grammy Awards.

QUOTE OF THE ISSUE



"We went down into the silent garden. Dawn is the time when nothing breathes, the hour of silence. Everything is transfixed, only the light moves." - Leonora Carrington

Maya Agarwal | Print Editor-in-Chief
Graphic by Maya Agarwal

The sun sneaks into my room when the sparrow sleeps in its nest. The sun sings to me. Sometimes, I hear the serendipity of sunken rays, turned quickly then to slate. Once, I listen. My breath– oh, am I breathing?

Silence arrives when it believes we need clarity. I used to believe silence offers a moment to let a busy mind talk: a moment that allows us to struggle with our thoughts and grow.

This is true, but I only understood its purpose halfway. I failed to realize that these moments were a two-way conversation. I neglected what silence had to say back. Unbeknownst to me then, dominating this dialogue was damaging.

I often find quiet in the soft flutter of Cali's golden hills, in the concrete steps leading up to my 10:00 a.m., and in the barren walls of my kitchen. In all these moments and more like them, I hear the quiet, but I do not listen because I do not think I can. That is, I say to myself I cannot stop what I am doing to be in the present. I am too busy, I am not going to relax, I have too many things to think about and no time to not. Now is not the right moment. I wish I had asked myself, when is?

Another time. The day before the day of fools was a quiet day. That day, I saw a herd of brown cows grazing on brass grass. It was green from dew. But the last rain was weeks ago, and I do not remember the color of the cows and the hills. It was so, so quiet. But I muffled my ears. What a pity I could not hear the silence.

Of course, life does not always let us slow down; there are moments when we have to push forward and get things done. However, when we can relax our pace but reject the opportunity, we throw away a window we might not get again. We must remember time is a malleable thing, and silence dominates its path, not us. We must struggle with the uncomfortable. Writhe in its suffocating openness.

A busy mind is good, but a blank mind is good too.

It is in the moment we embrace the deepening hum after cutting the car engine, or perhaps the subtle hiss of a pot as it slows to a boil, epiphany becomes second nature. Or perhaps, we do not know anything more than we did 20 seconds ago, but it is this that makes us feel so happy and light that epiphany becomes insignificant.

Silence lets us see the beauty of all that is and is not alive. Once we accept its gift– and it is this choice that we must make– it becomes very easy to cherish what we know and what we do not, to cherish life for what it is today. Not yesterday and not tomorrow, but now.

The quiet is a reminder to open our lungs and welcome the simple present.

It is quiet at dawn, and I feel hopeful on quiet mornings.

Can Vandalism Be Art?

Examining the difference between street art and graffiti

Olivia Foster and Samantha Swift | Head Section Editor and Staff Writer
Photos by Olivia Foster and Sof Cerruti

The general dictionary definition of the word "graffiti" describes it as unauthorized lettering, writing, or illustrations in public spaces. Commissioned street art, on the other hand, is a kind of art that is authorized through payment, usually to improve the aesthetics of a public space. The real question about different forms of art found on the street is whether beauty can be found in art that was not initially wanted or authorized, in addition to the art that is commissioned and welcomed.

Public spaces in the Lamorinda community are filled with many different murals, graffiti, and various other forms of art. When it comes to art in the Bay Area and beyond, the definitions of street art and graffiti differ based on who defines these art forms.

"Graffiti is more, in my opinion, a message, statement, or gag, more of a form of communication, whereas street art is a form of self-expression," Jennifer Perlmutter Gallery gallery owner and local artist Jennifer Perlmutter said.

While some describe street art as a form of self-expression, other artists may argue that graffiti is just a different outlet for artists to express themselves.

"I would say the way I define graffiti is getting your name up every single place you can, getting your name up in places people normally don't look. A lot of people see it as destruction and vandalism, which it is, but I also see it as an art form of self-expression," Digital Design teacher Christopher Busse said.

Although graffitiing private or public land is illegal, artists find other ways to keep the art form alive.

"When I started learning the history of it and the different styles, I became obsessed with it and I still will write my name on paper or when I'm in the shower and I'll practice tags and things like this. It really is an art form that takes over your entire life," Busse said.

Graffiti has become a prominent visual in the Bay Area's scenery as it can be spotted on billboards, bridges, freeways, and other popularly seen infrastructure. Its prevalence might be connected to the competitive nature of the art form.

"You're selfishly doing it for fame. You want your name to be up everywhere; even people who don't know what graffiti is will know, 'oh I've seen that guy around here.' Other graffiti writers will recognize you, and that's the whole purpose of it—to become recognized for your skills and who hits the highest and who gets the most [art] up," Busse said.

The creation of graffiti itself differs so much from any other form of art, spiking interest among young people.

"I like how graffiti is usually in places that are hard to access and places that are sometimes hard to imagine how somebody got up there," art student and junior Shepard Bellias said.

Similar to graffiti, street art is a popular form of artistic expression found in various communities. However, it differs in that it is a legal and approved form of art created in public spaces. Businesses or residents commission street artists to create a communal feeling and improve the aesthetics of their area.

"I think street art adds character to communities and is a cool way to display art within a city," art student and junior Bryn Billings said.

For both street art and graffiti, location plays a large role in shaping the perception of the artwork. Whether it is in a city or a suburb, the combination of the background and the art makes each piece unique.

"What makes it so compelling is that it is literally outside the box; it meets us in our environment where we don't expect it," Perlmutter said.

The beauty of graffiti as an art form is tied to the environment it is created

in. However, its aesthetics could still be matched on a professional level in different atmospheres.

"I think the nature of graffiti is that it belongs in the environment it was done in, so I think if it were put in a museum it could be photographed rather than on a canvas," Billings said.

The idea of graffiti has evolved over the years, but certain traits have stayed consistent, one being the importance of self expression.

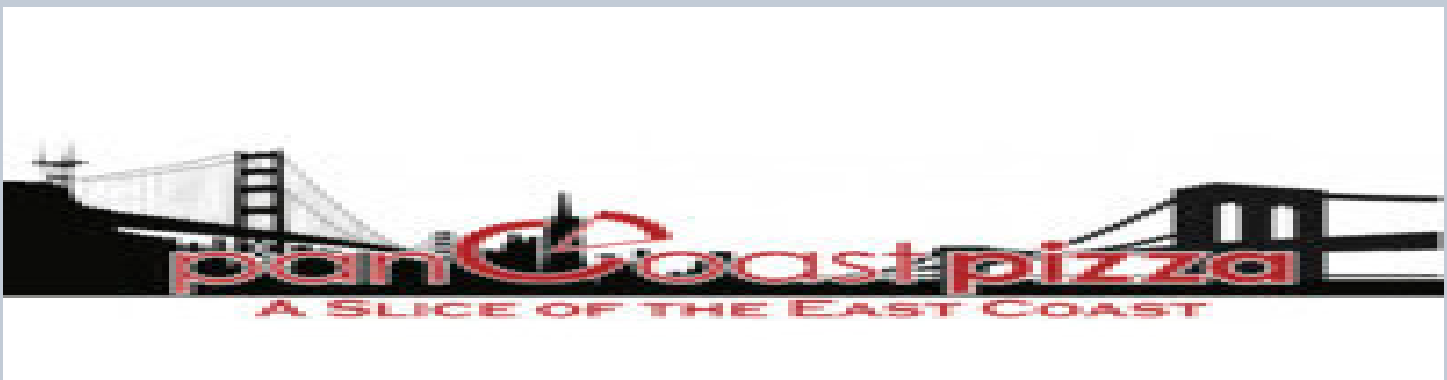
"It is real art. An expressive point of view makes something art, whether you do it on the side of a building or on a canvas doesn't matter," Perlmutter said.

A local swim team tradition expresses their spirit through spray painting a boulder on a hill in Moraga. The local rock has become a landmark, where the paint changes throughout the year, bringing new patterns and colors to brighten the hill.

"We add our swim logo and other words of motivation on the rock to represent the team. It's a really fun tradition that brings our team together," an anonymous student said.

Whether graffiti or any other art form, self expression remains a prominent aspect of the day to day lives of many.

"Creativity should be a part of our everyday life. [I support] art and expressive points of view, something that tells a story or evokes a feeling," Perlmutter said.



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BY KIMBERLEY HARRISON
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LA MODE: Faculty Fashion

Highlighting Staff Styles

Spread by Aya O'Neal

Aya O'Neal, Cara Hamilton, Noah Frankel, Olivia Silverstein, and Trevor Krick | Online Content Manager and Staff Writers

Teachers may be known for their lesson plans and lectures, but their fashion choices often make their own statements. From polished professionalism to quirky creativity, faculty fashion can reflect personality, practicality, and more. Some educators channel classic elegance, while others embrace bold, trendsetting looks.

What inspires their daily wardrobe choices? How has their style evolved over time? And do they swap their buttoned-up blazers for something more relaxed outside the classroom? Through interviews with faculty members, this article explores the influences, evolution, and individuality behind teacher styles that shape their presence in the classroom.

Q Does your style draw inspiration from anywhere?

A "I respond to things that get fed to me on my Google around men's fashion," Acalanes Principal Eric Shawn said.

"I think the general idea of how I dress is a little bit of utility. [I] have things that go with each other that are reasonable for the climate and just adaptable," social sciences teacher Adam Garcia said.

"I can't think of anyone specific that I'm influenced by, but I like colors that pop and anything that is unusual or timeless," AP English Language and Composition teacher Molly Fenn said.

How has your style evolved over time?

"I really think that my style has just evolved from my life experience and the decades that I have lived through. My style is really casual. I love great tennis shoes. I love a great [pair of] jeans ... I'm a huge NBA fan, so when Jordans came out in the '90s, I got my first pair, and so that kind of casual aesthetic has sort of been with me ever since," World History teacher Kristen Anderson said.

"When I was in high school, I used to sew my own clothes just for fun ... but I don't anymore. I have three daughters, they kind of keep me in check. I learn from them ... so as they're getting older and growing I've kind of grown with them," Chemistry and AP Chemistry teacher Daizy Asaravala said.

"I used to care more about my style in terms of what other people would think when I was younger, but then when I got older I just stopped caring about that and started dressing for myself and my own style and not worrying about if it's really trendy or fits in the popular look and just going off what I was saying if it's comfortable or my definition of cute and affordable," Geometry and Algebra 2 teacher Andy Case said.

"I try not to be too casual at work but I'm not wearing a shirt and tie either ... so it's kind of that same narrow band. I found what I like, and I stuck with it," Algebra 2 Pre-Calculus Honors and Engineering teacher Michael Buchel said.

"Most jobs that I've had, I had a uniform, so teaching was the first job where I got to choose how I dress. At first, I was just concerned with having a collar, I wore a lot of Polo shirts, and then over time I figured better ways to put outfits together ... [and] better ways to find things that are affordable, that I like, and that I'm going to wear for a while and get a lot of use out of," Garcia said.

Do you dress differently outside of school?

"Not necessarily. I might be more casual. But one time I met a friend for a walk and I thought I was just wearing normal clothes but she said 'I really like how you dress up for life," Fenn said.

"Sometimes I do wear more casual things like sweatpants but even my sweat outfits are pretty on point if I don't say so myself. And I am a part of gym culture so I do have [different] workout outfits," Asaravala said.

"I would honestly say not that differently. There are certain things I wouldn't wear to school, but I wear a lot of outfits that I wear to teach on the weekends," Case said.

"Not really. I'm not a clothes hound, so I'm not going to have a different wardrobe for home and work," Buchel said.

"I would say I wear a collar [shirt at school] more, but I'm slightly more casual at home. I won't really ever teach in a t-shirt, but if I'm not working you'll catch me in something a little more casual," Garcia said.

"More t-shirts, less collars ... but mostly the same," Shawn said.

"On the weekends, outside of school, I'm more black leggings and go from yoga to home to trail, so I do not dress as nice when I am off duty, but my style if I'm going out with my family is really not much different from how it is at school," Anderson said.

How would you describe your style in one word?

"Lab-Safe" Asaravala

"Casual" Buchel

"Chill" Anderson

"Granola" Case

"Hipster" Shawn

"Conservative" Stewart

"Practical" Garcia

"Electric" Fenn

ARTIST OF THE ISSUE

A peek into the life of a detailed and community-oriented Acalanes artist, Rohini Vrajmohan

Hanna Wisniewska, Melina Galacatos, and Audrey Parkin | Social Media Manager and Online Editors

Courtesy Photo by Rohini Vrajmohan

Senior Rohini Vrajmohan is a versatile musician; in Acalanes, as well as the broader Bay Area community, she pursues instrumental and choir performance with a special love for jazz. She plans to continue making the most of her passion for music once she graduates, by studying music in college.

Vrajmohan plays trumpet and sings in various programs. She is a member of the Acalanes Wind Ensemble, Jazz Ensemble, and Jazz Combo. While outside of school, she plays in the California Jazz Conservatory, SFJazz Allstars, and sings in the Cantabella Children's Chorus. Through these ensembles, Vrajmohan has had numerous opportunities to learn from, perform in, and travel with prestigious ensembles.

"[The California Jazz Conservatory] went to Europe last summer, and got to tour. I play the fourth trumpet and sing; I'm also the featured vocalist in that band. The second band that [I am in] is the SFJazz high school all-stars ... I play third trumpet, and that is one of the top jazz bands in the nation," Vrajmohan said.

Vrajmohan started instrumental music in elementary school after being inspired by a children's novel. She has been involved in choral performance ever since.

"When I was in fourth grade, I read the book The Trumpet of the Swan by E. B. White, and I was immediately inspired to play the trumpet," Vrajmohan said.

Despite this early introduction, she found her passion for jazz in middle school, under the guidance of Stanley Middle School Band Director Bob Athayde.

"I got into jazz trumpet because of the Athayde family. Bob Athayde introduced me to the Stanley jazz bands," Vrajmohan said.

Her passion for jazz continued to grow as she performed throughout high school, recognized by the jazz ensemble and wind ensemble Band Director, Edwin Cordoba.

"Since day one, Rohini has shown up to musical spaces with coachability, enthusiasm, and resilience. She has a real appreciation for music making," Cordoba said.

Instrumental music ensembles are based on collaboration; musicians follow cues from a conductor and each other to work together on harmonies, melodies, and rhythms to convey a story or evoke an emotion. Thus Vrajmohan has developed musical communication and collaboration skills through years of musical training and experience.

"Jazz specifically is all about community. [I have] been doing band and group work for so long that I find myself thriving in group work," Vrajmohan said, "You don't need to speak the same language to understand what they're saying through music. You could be speaking French or Spanish, but the music is still consistent and universal."

When performing, Vrajmohan shows her distinctive interpretation of music through the characteristics of restraint, melodic intention, and intrigue.

"The thing that has been really cool to see is how she has developed a unique point of view. That's not always present with young musicians. Her ability to 'say something' that is unique to her musical aesthetic and identity has been so exciting," Cordoba said.

Vrajmohan has applied to colleges as a music major and is working through the audition screening process for several, including the University of California Los Angeles and the University of Michigan Ann Arbor. Recently she has been focused on preparing for an in-person audition at her top school, New York University (NYU).

"The NYU audition is a bit different from other auditions, which are normally you playing alone in front of the adjudicators. The NYU one is a jam [session], so I'll be playing with other auditionees," Vrajmohan said.

Before she graduates high school and transitions to college-level instrumental music, there are still several concerts and events to look forward to.

"I also have a few concerts outside of school, one on March 17 with the California Jazz Conservatory Studio Band. I'm really looking forward to that one where I get to sing and play trumpet," Vrajmohan said.

Musical events are chances to build community and find new experiences through music. Participating in ensemble groups gives Vrajmohan unique opportunities to travel on a local level, and abroad.

"[One of my favorite musical memories is] playing at the North Sea Jazz Festival in Rotterdam, in the Netherlands when I went with the [California Jazz Conservatory] studio band. That one was probably our biggest crowd out of the concerts that we had there. Being up there in front of the entire crowd was stressful, but also a new experience that I enjoyed," Vrajmohan said. "I'm very happy that this is the path I chose for myself. I'm glad that ever since elementary school this is what I've been doing."

Unplugging Diet Culture

How schools can counteract social media's influence on eating habits

Tselmeg Orgilmunkh | Staff Writer

Graphic by Sela Sarbiewski

Blueprint would like to disclaim that this article contains mentions of disordered eating.

As I scroll through social media, I see video after video on the dangers of carbs, why carbs are necessary, the importance of protein, how to survive on just fruits and vegetables, the negative impacts of fats, why you need fats to survive, and edited pictures of influencers trying to convince me to spend money on high-protein snacks they do not even eat themselves.

Social media, an addictive and widely-used platform, is a space where people can post any content they want, causing the spread of a variety of diets that often lack proof or data from doctors or dietitians. Most diets are not universal, as online dieting recommendations often do not consider viewers' genetic and lifestyle differences. Instead, education based on research from professionals should teach teens what works for them or if no diet is needed at all.

In California's required seventh through 12th-grade health curriculum, teenagers should be taught healthy eating habits and media literacy to understand how to recognize lies online to combat the ever-growing eating disorders.

The glorification of thinness grew in the 90's and 2000's when "heroin chic" began trending. The majority of models occupying runways were sizes small and below, providing little diversity of body types. Oftentimes these models struggled with eating disorders themselves and the use of drugs and cigarettes was encouraged because they were widely believed to cause weight loss. Many popular 2000's movies casually shamed healthy girls, leading many viewers to believe they had to lose weight. The movie *Devil Wears Prada* called Andrea Sachs, a size four, too large. *Mean Girls* portrays Regina George's persistent dieting as a typical aspect of girlhood. Although these movies included these scenes to conform to stereotypes about women's values, these messages are harmful to easily-influenced young people watching the movies.

Twenty years ago, television and fashion shows dominated mainstream media. However, social media has since generally overshadowed them and has amplified the ability to influence beauty standards and health regimens. Television and fashion shows are full of celebrities who have seemingly unattainable body types and social media is full of influencers who use poses and editing, both of which normalize high beauty standards. Seeing conventionally "perfect" bodies all over the media causes viewers to develop body-image issues as it is difficult to discern what is real. The Nationally Library of Medicine noted in a 2023 article, "Social media use is highly prevalent amongst young people and previous research suggests an association with mental health problems, including poor body image." As social media use increases, education is crucial to identify artificial and unrealistic body standards on social media so that individuals do not compare themselves to unrealistic standards.

A 2020 study conducted by Case24 discovered that 71 percent of people use FaceTune, to reshape their body or change their features, before posting on Instagram. The fact that much of what we see online is altered creates a never-ending cycle of high expectations and edited pictures which others then try to achieve, contributing to the cycle of unattainable beauty expectations. Education on what a healthy weight and appearance is could prevent these online standards from influencing one's self-perception.

It is not teenagers' fault for believing in the media and being affected by high expectations. They are not just viewing beauty-standard bodies, industries and influencers are targetting them. A 2021 Tech Transparency Project experiment found that Facebook advertised weight-loss products to teens aged 13 to 17. An attorney at Social Media Victims Law

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Reinventing Psychedelics

Exploring the potential of psychedelic drugs as supplements to mental health treatment in medical settings

Audrey Parkin | Online Editor
Graphic by Sof Cerruti

Blueprint would like to disclaim that this article contains mentions of drug abuse. Blueprint would also like to awknowledge that our publication does not condone illegal drug use.

As the projector clicked off and whirred to a stop and the lights turned back on, whispers began to circulate through my Human and Social Development (HSD) classroom. Comments ranged anywhere from boredom and confusion to excitement and curiosity, but the substitute teacher shushed the room and urged us to get back to work.

We had just watched a documentary on the science behind mushrooms and mycelium in forests, and modern research on the medicinal usage of mushrooms. While this film was just meant to pass the time while our teacher was out sick, it raised important questions on the ethics and science of psychedelic substances, drugs that cause an altered state of consciousness. Psychedelics are controversial, but research backs them as being potentially revolutionary in the field of mental illness medicine.

According to the National Library of Medicine, humans have used psychedelic and hallucinogenic drugs for millennia, ranging anywhere from fulfilling spiritual rituals to feel a stronger connection to religious figures or for medicinal purposes to heal mental or physical ailments.

As America entered the 1960's, the controversial Hippie Movement—which advocated for an alternative lifestyle excluding violence and traditional values and instead opting for love, peace, and creativity—emerged. The Woodstock Music and Art Fair in 1969, one of the largest of the 1960's counterculture music festivals in the US with over 400,000 attendees, illustrates the conflicting sentiments toward the Hippie Movement. Starting out as busy, but under control, the concert quickly escalated into chaos; many began using drugs, traffic and abandoned cars rendered roads impassable, helicopters flew in emergency medical supplies, and three people died in the chaos.

The responses to Woodstock caused more than just the solidification of a stigma surrounding psychedelic drugs, it caused these types of drugs to be legally restricted. According to the University of California Berkeley Center for the Science of Psychedelics, former President Richard Nixon passed the Controlled Substances Act in 1970, prohibiting the use of most psychedelics in the U.S. The law categorizes drugs based on danger, addictive qualities, and potential for medicinal use, with "Schedule 1" drugs being at the top of the list as most dangerous, addictive, and with the least potential for medical use. Drugs like heroin and cannabis are grouped together in this category along with psychedelics like LSD and psilocybin. This legislation significantly inhibited research into the potential therapeutic uses of psychedelics for decades.

Past and present research has uncovered a multitude of positive effects on the brain from using these drugs in clinical settings, but also an array of possible negative effects.

According to the National Institute of Health (NIH), psychedelic and dissociative drugs promote positive changes in thinking and mood. Researchers suggest that these effects, including changes in brain functions that promote openness to new thoughts and experiences, are valuable for supplementing mental health treatment. According to the US Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), MDMA-assisted therapy to treat patients with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has proven an effective supplement to traditional therapy.

Positive experiences with psychedelic usage are heavily dependent on the potency of the medicine, as well as the patient's mindset. These substances can damage mental well-being if used incorrectly. This illustrates the necessity of classifying these substances as medicine because they are used more effectively when they are correctly prescribed and administered instead of abused.

A common worry when it comes to allowing greater access to psychedelic drugs is addiction. However, despite their "Schedule 1" classification, NIH research shows that psychedelics are less addictive than widely used substances like alcohol and caffeine.

Additionally, drugs like Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors which have been traditionally used to treat depression and anxiety, cause dependencies greater than those of psychedelic drugs like MDMA and psilocybin. Of course, if psychedelics were to be legalized, they would need to be strictly for medical usage in a controlled environment, so the risk of dangerous addiction would be minimal.

Despite the scientific evidence that psychedelic drugs are far less addictive than drugs such as alcohol and caffeine, the latter face less stigma than psychedelics. The stigma not only intimidates scientists from further research and exploration in this area of medicine but also plays a role in the decisions of the federal government when it comes to law-making and substance control for psychedelics.

"Before you can decide if [psychedelics are] good or bad, there needs to be proper research done to understand what they do to the brain. [Since] the general consensus has been that this is a taboo subject, there's been a historic lack of permission and funding for that research although this is changing," Research Specialist in the neuroscience department of the Medical University of South Carolina Julia Loghinov said.

Changing the conversation around psychedelics starts with education. Currently, schools frame psychedelics as dangerous and illegal drugs, which can advise against unregulated use but also teach closed-minded views, restricting their knowledge regarding the potential of these substances. If schools shifted their teachings of psychedelics, instead portraying them as important medicine, students would still be advised against uncontrolled use without adding to the stigma of psychedelics.

Blueprint Graphic/Bo Chevaleau

Acalanes currently teaches about psychedelics in Human and Social Development (HSD), a required course for graduation.

"HSD in general, especially [the drug use] unit, is about providing information so that students can make the most informed and correct decisions for themselves. We attempt to teach things in a neutral way, without judgment but rather providing information," HSD teacher Jada Paniagua said.

These changes in education to the rhetoric surrounding psychedelics can make their way up to a national level where changes are already being made. According to the VA, "as of February 2024, the states of Oregon and Colorado, have legalized psilocybin for medicinal purposes in supervised settings. Similar bills are currently underway in the states of California, Washington, New Jersey, and Massachusetts."

This is progress, but we must continue to change the frame through which we teach about psychedelics to allow psychedelic-type drugs a place in the world of mental illness treatment.

Diet Culture

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Center believes companies are aware of the harm they cause to young people through images and videos promoting unhealthy eating, even though the use of their products by minors has caused injuries and death.

Although a lack of self-confidence is a pressing issue, there are consequences to one's health due to excessive dieting. One unfortunate product of unhealthy mindsets and behaviors surrounding foods is eating disorders which the American Psychiatric Association defines as "behavioral conditions characterized by severe and persistent disturbance in eating behaviors and associated distressing thoughts and emotions." These disorders are especially prevalent in younger populations. An article from the University of Massachusetts Medical School reports that one in five teens experience disordered eating habits.

Eating disorders pose a range of health risks such as fatigue, organ failure, brain damage, delayed puberty, infertility, becoming socially distant, etc. A 2013 ScienceDirect article found that the mortality rate for people with eating disorders is up to six times higher than for people without eating disorders. These symptoms illustrate the necessity of reform surrounding the diet habits of teens. Additionally, once teenagers are educated on these serious side effects, these consequences could convince them to participate in healthy eating habits.

Some high schools currently teach nutrition to students, which has demonstrated positive effects. The National Library of Medicine's 2021 research found that adolescents educated in nutrition had positive changes in food habits and choices. Similarly, the Durham Health Department found that classrooms encouraging healthy eating practices often led to students making healthy choices outside of school. If schools that teach nutrition currently are seeing positive impacts, schools around the world should be encouraged to adopt it into their health curriculums as well.

The Acalanes Union High School District must reform its health curriculum. Knowledge about healthy diets and behaviors is lacking on the Acalanes campus. I hear my peers casually mention starving themselves, to which there is no reaction. This habit seems like a mundane aspect of our world as we have not been taught otherwise.

We need to reflect on how social media has encouraged an unhealthy relationship with appearance and food and teach the importance of health. If schools teach healthy eating habits, they can foster a space where teens grow self-confidence and do not feel the need to meet unrealistic standards seen on the internet, especially through drastic measures. People should not feel the need to prioritize their appearance over their mental or physical well-being just to achieve self-love. Self-love should be unconditional.

The American Mosaic

Counteracting cultural erosion by embracing cultural identity

Audrey Tugade | Staff Writer
Graphic by Sof Cerruti

I remember visiting my grandmother's house as a child, where she would tell stories in a language I did not understand. She would try to teach me how to cook traditional dishes with her, play her childhood games with my cousins, and garden her tropical plants that reminded her of home. When she passed away, I realized how little I truly understood of the culture she had tried to pass down. The language, the customs, the stories, they all seemed to slip away with her, and I was left behind with just fragments of a heritage I no longer felt connected to. It is a loss that is more common than we realize and one that has profound effects on how we see ourselves.

The blending of all the cultures that make up American society has contributed to the erosion of individual cultural identities and the fading of important traditions. To counteract this loss, individuals must celebrate and preserve their heritage, not only to foster personal acceptance and well-being but also to enrich the broader American experience by maintaining the cultural diversity that makes our nation unique.

In the early 1900's, the concept of the "melting pot" was widely promoted, particularly in the context of the increasing influx of immigrants to the U.S. during the Age of Mass Migration, where over 30 million Europeans and other ethnicities came to America. This idea suggested that diverse cultures would blend together into one shared American identity. But what happens when people from all over the world melt together to form this American identity? The result is a slow but steady erosion of individual identities where immigrants abandon their traditional customs, lose their native language, and shed their cultural roots.

The generational gap between older generations and younger generations further exacerbates cultural erosion - the gradual loss of a culture's traditions, beliefs, languages, and practices. According to the Pew Research Center, two-thirds of third-generation Americans do not feel connected to their families' country of origin at all. The differences in values, beliefs, and perspectives between people of different age groups become apparent when these American-born individuals primarily identify as American rather than their cultural heritage and ancestral roots. This shift in identity highlights the influence of American culture and society on newer generations born in America, further emphasizing the detachment from their cultural traditions.

The disconnect between younger Americans and their cultural heritage has caused them to also reject their cultural identity. This refusal of identity has been found to have negative effects on mental health as it is a rejection of an important aspect of one's self. An observational study conducted in 1971 by mental health and multicultural psychologists S. Sue and Sue concluded that a person who rejects traditional ways and internalizes society's negativity toward minority groups may develop racial self-hatred. Individuals from minority groups who internalize stereotypes and beliefs from the dominant culture may exhibit lower self-esteem and experience cultural dissonance, leading to the rejection of their heritage.

The National Library of Health reports that positive ethnic identity has been correlated to higher levels of self-esteem, the development of stronger coping mechanisms, and greater optimism. By having a balance between both their American culture and traditional heritage, they can have a better perception of their identity instead of suppressing one side of themselves.

Furthermore, languages can become endangered due to societal pressures when the speakers teach their children a more widely spoken language than theirs. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization reports that nearly 90 percent of the world's languages are at risk of extinction by the end of the century. This cultural extinction is unlike biological extinction where it does not necessarily involve genetic extinction or even deaths. Practices and traditions are at risk of vanishing. Therefore, it is crucial for people to recognize and celebrate their heritage and preserve it.

Currently, in America cultural celebra-

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The Costs of Fear

The widespread consequences of scapegoating immigrants

Sameed Marco | Online Content Manager
Graphic by Sof Cerruti

"Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free" reads the plaque at the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, the welcoming figure of Ellis Island and a historic entry point for U.S. immigrants. These words, from Emma Lazarus' poem "The New Colossus," highlight America's place in the world as a refuge.

Immigration has been a near-universal part of America's identity since its founding. According to the U.S. census, around 99 percent of Americans have a notable portion of ancestors who immigrated after colonization. That being said, U.S. policy around immigration has always been a major point of debate in the political system.

Recent elections have changed the way immigration has been discussed on a national level. The emphasis has been put largely on undocumented immigrants and the proposed threat they bring to our country while ignoring the systems that lead to people feeling that undocumented immigration is their only option.

This conversation often takes a white nationalist tone and ignores America's history as a nation of immigrants. It does not consider migrants' wellbeing and the assumption made is that white Americans have a greater entitlement to America than others. This use of white nationalism appeared in President Trump's campaigns in 2016 and 2024 where he claimed that his immigration policies will solve the problems facing the working class such as the housing crisis and the high cost of everyday goods.

Those in power shape our attitudes towards immigration and the policies they implement have and will continue to be harmful to American communities and the American economy. Framing immigrants as a problem for the country takes away their humanity and sows hate in our communities. Attempts to find solutions to this "problem" create dangerous environments and waste taxpayer dollars.

Trump has already imposed major changes to immigration policy that prioritize enforcement of immigration laws and punishment. His policies allow state and local law agencies to act as immigration officers and deny benefits and work permits to undocumented immigrants. These policies will likely be disproportionately applied to those from lower-income areas and areas with more people of color as these areas already experience higher rates of surveillance and law enforcement.

These policies build off of the legislation Trump put in place in his first term, during which he: took away federal funding from cities that did not cooperate with immigration enforcement, prosecuted a record amount of immigration crimes, and trained Border Patrol agents in conducting investigations on whether immigrants had a fair reason for asylum which took power away from the judicial system. These policies are short-sighted and use immigrants as a scapegoat instead of addressing more pressing issues affecting Americans.

Additionally, Trump's immigration policies do not address economic issues like he suggests is his intent. Trump has requested an increase in funding of $3 billion for Customs and Border Patrol. Not only is this expensive, but it will deter production as U.S. undocumented migrants contribute greatly to the economy and deportation would lead to a 4.2 percent to 6.8 percent loss in GDP according to the American Immigration Council. This would be comparable to the Great Recession during which the GDP lost about 4.3 percent. Key industries such as agriculture and manufacturing would lose 225,000 workers and construction would lose 1.5 million.

Beyond just the economy, mass deportation would have negative effects on U.S. citizens. Deporting the 20 million people Trump claims are in the country illegally would require mass surveillance and the expansion of enforcement agencies. Both of which would likely limit the freedoms of all American citizens.

Instead of focusing on deportation, we

should center conversations around how we can reform our immigration system. Currently, there are three ways to enter the U.S. legally: family reunification, recruitment by companies, and entrance as a refugee or asylum seeker. For family reunification, you must be a spouse or immediate family of a U.S. citizen or a spouse or child of a green card holder. Recruitment by companies, also known as H1B visas, requires an employer who employs a minimum number of U.S. citizens to sponsor your immigration. Lastly, asylum seekers and refugees must generally be unable to return to their home country due to persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Each of these categories gets assigned a ceiling, a cap on the number of immigrants allowed into the U.S. per year, and then each country gets to fill up to seven percent of this ceiling annually.

This means if you are in an area where lots of people are facing persecution and need to seek refugee status, you may be waiting for a long time. Additionally, asylum is a lengthy legal process that is not always easily accessible. These factors deter legal immigration and prompt migrants to enter the country illegally.

Often in conversations around immigration, a correlation between criminality and morality is made. Politicians sensationalize illegal immigration, making the general public believe that immigrants are morally corrupt for breaking the law. This allows them to use fear-mongering and suggest that illegal immigrants will pose a threat to American society to influence opinions in favor of immigration restrictions. This once again ignores the humanity of these people who may be breaking the law to protect themselves and their families from persecution.

Another problem with the term "illegal" is the bias behind it. The term is often associated with migrants from Latin America and rarely those of European descent. Politicians like Trump use these implicit biases to create an us versus them narrative, further deteriorating perceptions of the humanity of these people.

Immigration reform is necessary in the long term as the system does not properly consider the situation of the petitioner. It is estimated that there are around 11 million undocumented immigrants in the country today and despite the government focusing a considerable amount of resources on limiting undocumented immigration, people continue to cross into the U.S. Deportation of all these residents is not logistically feasible and not wise for the well-being of our country.

Our conversations around immigration need to focus less on fear-mongering and villainizing immigrants and more on how we can fix the problems with the immigration system. The way we talk about these issues contributes to the narratives that influence policy. By prioritizing empathy when talking about immigration in our daily lives we can all combat negative rhetoic implicit bias and fear-mongering fuels.

Empathy also involves action. Being active in the protection of our communities is so important. The executive branch is actively putting policies in place. U.S. Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) tries to prey on people not knowing their rights to make arrests. There are many organizations such as the Immigrant Defense Project who attempt to combat this.

If you want to be proactive, you can help educate your community. One common way people have been doing this is through red cards, which are cards that help people assert their rights in various situations such as when ICE agents are present, according to San Mateo County's official website. There are also local organizations and community law centers that you can volunteer for or donate to that work to protect immigrant rights.

Lastly, voice your concerns with local officials and politicians on the effect that these policies have on our communities. Go to www.usa.gov/elected-officials to see everyone who represents you. Remember that these are people in public office and deserve to hear what you want from them.

Embracing Cultural Identity

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tions are becoming more publicly widespread with an increase of awareness of cultural practices and traditions to help counteract cultural extinction. In the early 1900's, the Chinese immigrants in San Francisco brought their New Year's holiday to the U.S. and blended it with the American tradition of parades, producing the Chinese New Year's parades that continue to enrich the Bay Area today. These parades are not just an example of how people can blend and share their own heritage with American culture and preserve it but also how the diverse cultures contribute to the American story.

Within Acalanes, Ethnic Studies has become a required course where students not only learn about other ethnicities and cultures within America but explore their own identity. In addition, colleges and high school curricula require at least two years of a foreign language to expand cultural understanding and enable communication with people of diverse backgrounds. It is through these actions that individuals can learn to celebrate and embrace their cultural heritage and identity.

The concept of the melting pot pressures people to abandon their cultures, languages, and traditions for assimilation. Yet, it is important to know that updating the melting pot to other metaphors can enrich our understanding of and apreciation for the unity and diversity of cultures within the United States. The American Identity is not just one idea or belief, it is the sum of many lives, experiences, cultures, and traditions. Multiple cultures can co-exist while also celebrating each of their identities and heritage.

Being American does not mean we have to give up other parts of our identity. Celebrating and embracing our cultural heritage does not make anyone less American. In fact, it is through each of our individual and unique identities that we embody the true spirit of this nation. Rather than a melting pot, America is more like a mosaic where the individuals come together to form an artwork and each of the pieces is visible which comes together to form a beautiful, vibrant whole. This is what makes us truly American.

Meet the Spring Sports Captains

A look into team captains' roles and goals for their upcoming season

Donovan McGrath, Owen Curley, and Max Trexler | Business & Community Outreach Team Member and Social Media Manager and Staff Writers

Photos provided by each athlete

Baseball: senior leadership

This season, the baseball team looks to senior leadership as they hope to provide the school a North Coast Section (NCS) championship title, adding on to the success that this program has had over the years.

"I'm hoping [for] the team this year, [to] win our league and win the NCS tournament. That'd be really cool for the school and our program. I feel like that's what everyone wants, to end the season on a win," Gonzales said.

With changes to the coaching staff this season, players have to adapt to new ways of playing which can be challenging. But these seniors in their final year hope to make the transition easier.

"With the new head coach being an assistant coach from last year, just bridging the gap between the coaches and players and making sure that we're getting done what needs to get done and kind of making a smooth transition from coach to coach," Stadt said.

With baseball not dictating official team captains, the seniors have stepped up to fill the leadership role. Because the roster is filled with many underclassmen, experience is very much valued out of these players. These seniors have the responsibility of leading, not only on the field, but in the clubhouse, school, and in the community.

"[Some responsibilities that come with this leadership role is] making sure everyone is accountable. Setting an example for everyone and making sure everyone's being accountable for everyone and kind of making sure everyone's doing what they need to do, and what they're supposed to be doing," Gonzales said.

Men's Golf: Brody Greenfield

As the men's golf team tees off into a new season, senior captain Brody Greenfield strives to set a good example in terms of skill and team morale.

"Being captain means that I have a standard to play well, while also making sure the team is united and competing to get better everyday," Greenfield said.

Being the leader of the team, Greenfield feels confident in the team's ability to succeed this season.

"I'm mostly looking forward to competing against schools in the area, Campolindo especially, we have a great group of guys and I think if we all play our best we can beat anybody," Greenfield said.

Bonding is an essential part of becoming a successful team, and is especially important for the golf team because it is composed of players from different grades.

"Team bonding is definitely a part of the agenda … so that everyone can get to know each other better. [Bonds between players] should help us succeed more," Greenfield said.

Greenfield values his nomination as a captain and looks forward to stepping into his leadership role this season.

"Being captain is important to me because it's my senior year and because I'm captain I know that the coach can trust me to not only perform every match, but also to do my best to keep everyone in check in practices and matches," Greenfield said.

Men's Tennis: Sammy Foster and Nick Owens

As the Acalanes men's tennis team serves up another great season, the Dons hope to have a fun and successful year under the leadership of captains Sammy Foster and Nick Owens.

With the hope of competing in all of their matches, being a captain comes with an exciting yet challenging role. This season, the senior captains hope to carry on the tradition of creating a positive team atmosphere, following the examples of the captains that came before them.

"It's important because my freshman and sophomore year, I had captains that were really inspiring and brought the team together and just made the team environment better, and I sort of want to bring that to our team now as a senior," Owens said.

The captains act as glue to hold the team together, using their authority to help the team in any way they can.

"Responsibilities just include getting to know the players, honestly, just bringing everyone together as a team and making sure that we're all collaborating and getting along. And then also … if anyone needs improvements, [if] we need to be doing anything else, [or if] the coach needs anything, then I'm sort of the person to go to," Owens said.

In their last season of high school tennis, the captains hope to lead the team to success, aspiring to go far in the postseason.

"I think this year just really brings the team together and hopefully we have

a strong bond as a team and try to just win all our matches, win the league, and have a good NCS run," Owens said.

Men's Volleyball: Matthew Law and Avyn Morales

As the men's volleyball team kicks off the season, senior captains Matthew Long and Avyn Morales look forward to working with their teammates to get better every day.

"I love the team, working together as a whole, and just bringing the energy every day. It's just really fun watching the guys progress because the more you progress, the more you win," Morales said.

In the past, the team has been close-knit as they played club volleyball together in the offseason, but this year, the team is younger and has less experience working together. The captains hope to connect with their new teammates and build strong bonds within the team.

"Last year I played with some players who also did club with me, so I was used to that chemistry, but this year it's all new to me. So I'm just trying to build up that connection with the guys," Morales said.

Team bonding is a big part of the game, and the captains work to create a sense of comradery within the team.

"We have team dinners usually weekly, and we also get together before games to get locked in," Morales said.

This year, the Dons look to break out of the semifinals and make a deep playoff run. They believe that this year, they have the talent to do so.

"I hope to lead us to an NCS title, get past the semifinals, and beat Bishop O'Dowd for once because they've always been a team that we've lost to for four years, this is the year to do it," Morales said.

Softball: Esa Orman, *Avery Robb, and Emme Young

As the softball team slides into a new season, senior leaders and captains Esa Orman, Avery Robb, and Emme Young hope to provide a safe space for growth and development as well as a culture of winning as they approach their last year as Dons.

"This year it is important for us to really keep a good mindset throughout this season. They put us in a more difficult league, but even so our effort and hard work should still be the same," Orman said.

The Dons will face difficult competition, so creating a positive team environment is imperative for success.

"I think it is important to be involved in just creating a good atmosphere for sports and making sure that everyone is having a good time and being supported. I feel like being a captain you are involved in that," Young said.

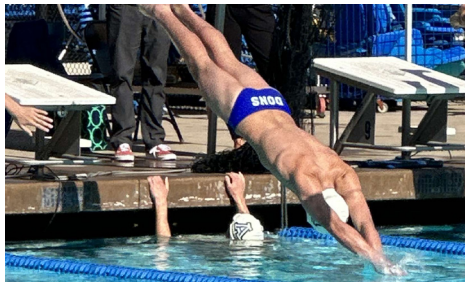
In their leadership role, the captains are responsible for keeping the team organized and being good role models.

"Besides communicating with the team about upcoming practices and stuff, practice being able to be an example, and lead other people to make sure that they are being supported," Orman said.

Despite all of the responsibilities that come with being a team captain, the softball captains plan to enjoy the time they have left to participate in the sport with their teammates.

"At school it is definitely fun to play with my friends. It is really fun to play with people at the school. All other clubs teams I have been on have been based out of San Ramon, Danville, or whatever so it's fun to play with people that I am friends with at school," Orman said.

Swim: Jace Carter and Anthony Yamamoto



Going into their final swim season at Acalanes, senior captains Jace Carter and Anthony Yamamoto are thrilled to lead the team to success.

The captains not only look to succeed in the water but also outside of competing in order to be the best captains they can be.

"Being a captain is important to me because it allows me to help others on and off the deck and gives people an outlet to go to if they need help with anything," Carter said.

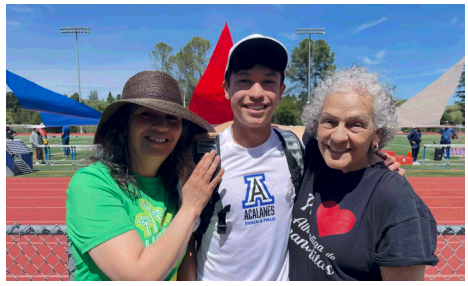
This being the captains last year they look to make their presence felt and leave an impact on the program that will last after they graduate.

"I hope to leave an impact on the swim team and the upcoming swimmers by bringing fun to the sport that isn't there unless there's a balance between being serious and having a good time," Yamamoto said.

The captains say part of the reason being a captain is so important to them is because they have seen what a good captain looks like from when they were younger swimmers.

"Being captain means a lot to me because of the former captains and swimmers before me who were great leaders and put an emphasis on team culture and having fun at practice and meets," Yamamoto said.

Track & Field: *Haley Chelemedos and Alex Fon



As the grass greens and a new spring season emerges, athletes from around Acalanes prepare for another great season of track and field. senior Haley Chelemedos and sophomore Alex Fon hope to contribute to this great season, not only on the track, but in his leadership roles.

"I'm looking forward to my own growth, but also some of my friends came this time, so I'm also looking forward to being able to train with them," Fon said.

Despite being only a sophomore,

Fon is committed to establishing a winning culture for the team, as well as contributing to the fun that track & field offers. This creates a challenging yet rewarding role.

"Stuff like leading warmups and all that, but also, you know, helping out, anyone who's new with questions they have helping out your teammates, stuff like that," Fon said.

Despite track and field not really having the identity of a team sport, making new friends and establishing a work ethic is the main thing valued for the Dons.

"Honestly, I hope that we can all grow a lot from last year or any newcomers that can get faster as they want to, and that we just have a lot of fun at the meats, and not be super stressed," Fon said.

Being a captain sets players apart from the rest, as they take accountability for other runners around them. However, this does not seem to be an issue for Fon, as excitement and passion is more on the mind for him.

"I get to help out my teammates and kind of become more connected to the whole program in a way. That's why being a captain is important to me," Fon said.

Women's Lacrosse: Campbell Evans, Megan Churchill, and Claire Zimmerman

As the women's lacrosse season begins, senior captains Campbell Evans, Megan Churchill, and Claire Zimmerman are looking forward to working together with their teammates and establishing a positive team environment.

"I'm most looking forward to seeing the dynamic of the team this year because we lost a lot of seniors last year. We have around six sophomores, so it is kind of a young team. I'm really excited to see how we all work together, create a team culture, and work toward success," Evans said.

Despite being on varsity, the team captains hope to serve as an inspiration for the girls on the junior varsity (JV) team, pushing everyone to work hard and do their best.

"I want girls on JV to see the progression they can make just like I did, and for my teammates on varsity I aim to be a positive voice on and off the field to uplift all the girls at the same time as pushing everyone to work hard and push themselves," Zimmerman said.

The captains plan to instill a positive team culture by frequently putting on team bonding events.

"Our team has a lot of bondings. One of our favorite things that we do is called the Amazing Race. It's basically like a scavenger hunt around Lafayette with different teams and whoever finishes first wins," Evans said.

As captains, Evans, Churchill, and Zimmerman make sure to bring a competitive nature to practices and games, along with building a team culture.

"As captains, we set the tone for practices and games. We have to set a good level of intensity so we can get work done and make sure we are ready for games. Additionally, another big responsibility to me is making sure the team culture stays good," Zimmerman said.

***Blueprint** would like to acknowledge that *Haley Chelemedos and *Avery Robb are members of* **Blueprint** *staff.*

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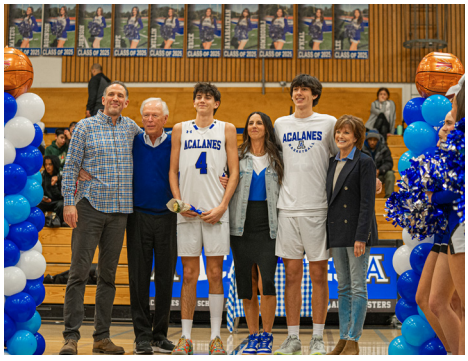
Senior Season

Celebrating the seniors of Acalanes winter sports teams

Molly Jones, Nico Roig, and Gwyneth Lee | Print Photo Story Editor, Print Sports Editor, and Staff Writer

As the end of the season nears, each Acalanes sport holds a senior night celebration to honor its seniors whose high school athletic careers are coming to a close.



Blueprint Photo/ Isaac Topp

Maddox Malm and family.

Men's Basketball

Seniors: Chase Bahou, Maddox Malm, Brady Quinn, Joe Reidenbach, and Ian Salmon

Men's basketball held its senior night on Feb. 6, holding their ceremony before starting their game against Concord High School. The team celebrated their five seniors as they walked down the court with family and were handed balloons, posters, and goodie bags from their fellow teammates. As they walked down the court, the announcer shared who they were walking with as well as their favorite memories from their time at Acalanes. The team won 66-50, and the seniors contributed most of the playing time and scoring.

"It was nice to not only celebrate our seniors but celebrate the success we have gotten to see after going through thick and thin with this program over the last couple of years," Quinn said.

Women's Basketball

Seniors: Sophie Chinn*, Natalie Frechman, Ariana Hallstrom, Karyss Lacanlale, and Dulci Vail

The women's basketball team honored its seniors during their game against College Park, which they won 81-8. This group of seniors has played a major role in the success of the Acalanes women's basketball program over the past couple of years, winning four consecutive Diablo Athletic League championships. Senior night was a very special moment for the players and the entire Acalanes basketball community, as many gathered in the gym to celebrate the seniors and cheer them on as they walked down the middle of the court with families.

"[Tonight] meant a lot to us because all the seniors have been playing together for years, some since elementary school and some since middle school. We met through ... club basketball typically during summertime and have created a great bond and flow during our games. It is definitely sad for it to be coming to an end just because of the history we have together, but celebratory in a way because some girls will be moving on to play in college," Frechman said.

Blueprint Photo/ Isaac Topp

Joe Reidenbach recieves his poster from cheerleader Chloe Lloyd.

Blueprint Photo/Molly Jones

Ariana Hallstrom and family.

Wrestling

Seniors: Roman Bettiga, Maya Rotershteyn, and Ian Sanftner

Blueprint Photo/Gwyneth Lee

Roman Bettiga and family.

Wrestling kicked off its senior night on Feb. 5 with their dual match against Concord High School. Each senior walked down the mat with their family by their side as their coach presented them and shared their favorite wrestling memories.

"[Senior night was] special for me because it represents all the work I've put in over all the years I've been [wrestling]," Sanftner said.

Sideline Cheer

Seniors: Duku Bayarsaikhan, Erica Gombordorj, Sienna Hope, Kalia Johnson, Kate Lee*, Fabia Mailin, Heloisa Mateus, Maddie Mullin, Aya O'Neal*, Ruby Robinson, and Caroline Urick

The sideline cheerleaders celebrated their senior night on Feb. 6 alongside the men's basketball team. Each senior walked down the court with a sash and tiara on, with their family by their sides and an announcer sharing their names and favorite memories during their time on the cheer squad. After walking past their teammates, each cheerleader received a bag of chocolates from the basketball team, flowers, and a small basket with jewelry and a card.

"Senior night is particularly special because you can really reflect on your entire journey in the sport. I've been cheering with these girls my entire high school career. It is amazing to not only celebrate my other senior friends, but also having the underclassmen showing some of their appreciation to us," Mateus said.

Blueprint Photo/Isaac Topp

Duku Bayarsaikhan and teamate Rihye Kim.

Women's Soccer

Seniors: Melisa Adatepe, Sof Cerruti*, Lucca DeBiasse, Reiney Fish, Olivia Foster*, Leila Hamidi, Sienna Houston, Taylor Mikalis, Nicole Nguyen, Alex Salazar, and Demi Woods

Women's soccer celebrated senior night on Feb. 13 prior to their game against league rival Northgate. The game ended up being postponed due to flooding of the field, and the final score after two days of play was a 1-1 draw with Mikalis delivering the sole goal. Amidst the rainfall, the soaked seniors wearing sashes and tiaras walked through the middle of the field with their families.

Blueprint Photo/Isaac Topp

Heloisa Mateus and family.

"[Senior night] was kind of the culmination of all the hard work that we've put into the season, and we kinda had some ups and downs in terms of the results, especially this season. It was raining, but it was really fun to be with all of my friends and see all the work that the parents put in for us and all the other teammates and how they care for us," Adatepe said.

Men's Soccer

Seniors: Simon Appel, Griffin Dubois, Colby Ebner, Jeremy Lara, Ben Pecci*, Ryan Rho-Baity, Zack Roder, Eitan Romick, Jonny Roth, Nico White, and Ethan Wilberts

Men's soccer celebrated their senior night on Feb. 11, before beating Northgate 3-1. The team stood in front of the bleachers as each senior thanked their families and read the small, personal speech they had individually prepared, before handing their families a sunflower.

"[Senior night] is special because I haven't really seen other sports or schools do what we do and how we bring flowers to our parents and speak to them directly. I think it's very special for both the players and our parents because we get to share how much they mean to us," Roth said.

Blueprint Photo/Gwyneth Lee.

***Blueprint** would like to acknowledge that Kate Lee's and Ben Pecci's sisters, *Gwyneth Lee and *Natalie Pecci respectively, are members of* **Blueprint** *staff.* **Blueprint** *would also like to acknowledge that *Sof Cerruti, *Sophie Chinn, *Olivia Foster, and *Aya O'Neal are members of* **Blueprint** *staff.*

Contributing Photo/Danny Polkinhorn

Leveling Up

How American soccer can become a global superpower

Will Miller | Staff Writer
Spread by Isaac Topp

When you consider the differences between the U.S. and the rest of the world, two things come to mind: our measurement system and our soccer system. While I will always support using pounds and feet, the rest of the world knows what they are doing when it comes to soccer, making the current U.S. soccer system look archaic in comparison. U.S. soccer leagues should follow the European example by including a promotion and relegation system as it would create greater competition and benefit fans.

The U.S. soccer system began in the 1990s when the U.S. threw its hat in the ring to host the World Cup. Having a professional level of soccer is a main requirement to host the World Cup, which did not exist in the US at the time. To fulfill this requirement, a group of investors started Major League Soccer (MLS). This league had some key differences from its international counterparts in order to "Americanize" the sport. These differences included penalty shootouts instead of ties, and no promotion and relegation system.

Unlike other professional sports, soccer works differently in that standings are decided by a point system. MLS teams gain three points for a win, one point for a tie, and zero points for a loss. Scoring differentials contribute to rankings if multiple teams have the same number of points.

A promotion and relegation system works by having multiple levels of competition and a fluid tier system. That means the bottom three finishers by a point total in the league move to a lower professional division, and the top three finishers by points in the lower league move up to the higher league.

The problem with not having a promotion and relegation system is that teams like the 2023 Toronto FC, which ended the season winning only four out of 24 possible games, are able to continue playing in a competitive league. In Europe, a team as uncompetitive as this would be demoted to a lower league. Instead, a team like Toronto can keep competing and profiting from the MLS on top of getting the first pick in the MLS draft.

A major positive for promotion and relegation is the elimination of all forms of tanking, which is losing purposefully to gain the benefits awarded to a low ranked team. Currently, teams that end the season with low rankings receive benefits such as high draft picks. A promotion and relegation system eliminates the incentive to lose because of the financial repercussions of losing out on top division money granted to winning teams. Also, the stress of each game mattering so much more will increase the effort from players. As a result, there will be more competitive games that raise the standard of play in the league.

Increased competition will benefit the fans, as the entertainment value of each game increases. Compared to the current system, promotion and relegation creates exciting stories every season because there are two races: the title race to see what team will be crowned champion and the relegation race to see what team will be cast off to a lower league.

Additionally, the new system introduces "Cinderella" stories to professional soccer. A "Cinderella" story is where a team with a lower status has an unexpected rise or run. Stories like this rally the community and fanbase, and they also intrigue the rest of the league because they confuse fans as to how a team with a small stature could upset more prominent teams. Additionally, news companies love stories like these, so there would be increased media attention. Stories like these are largely unseen, except for in the March Madness NCAA Basketball tournament, but a system like this would allow "Cinderella" stories to turn into powerhouses.

Imagine a team from Rhode Island joining the top-flight league. The interest would be massive and, frankly, a promotion and relegation system provides the opportunity for underrepresented markets to be represented and flourish. Recently, the United Soccer League (USL), another American soccer league, has vowed to create a promotion and relegation system with three leagues in the 2027 season. They believe the new system will build a better soccer community in the US.

"The USL model empowers clubs with greater autonomy and fosters a dynamic, interconnected system-one that allows them to compete at the highest level while remaining deeply rooted in their communities. Around the world, top-tier clubs thrive in cities of all sizes, and we believe the same is possible here. The demand and infrastructure are in place, and the potential for growth is immense," USL CEO Alec Papadakis said in a statement on Feb. 13.

The best way to keep US soccer moving forward is to go out and support the USL, especially because it is as easy as watching a game on television or going out to the Oakland Coliseum and watching the Roots.

All in all, US soccer is headed in the right direction, and the inclusion of a promotion and relegation system will help the US to become the soccer powerhouse it has the potential to be.

Yay for Nay: Naomi Girma's Record-Breaking Transfer

Understanding the athlete with the most expensive trade yet in women's soccer

Olivia Foster | Head Section Editor
Spread by Bo Chevaleau

Blueprint would like to disclaim this article contains a mention of suicide.

In 2024, the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) team, the Orlando Pride, set the record for the most expensive professional women's soccer transfer, paying 740 thousand dollars for forward Barbara Banda. The NWSL's expansion team, Bay Football Club (FC), broke this record within the same year when they paid 862 thousand dollars to transfer forward Racheal Kudananji from Madrid Women's Football Club (CFF).

However, it was not until January of this year that defender Naomi Girma shattered the transfer fee glass ceiling when the Women's Super League team Chelsea FC Women paid 1.1 million dollars to have her play on their pitch. The first transfer of a men's professional footballer for over one million dollars occurred in 1979 when Trevor Francis moved from England's Football League One to the English Premier League.

Girma, a San Jose native, is one of the most prominent defenders in professional women's soccer today. At the age of 24, she has accumulated a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) championship title, an NWSL Shield, United States Soccer's Player of the Year, two Defender of the Year Awards, Rookie of the Year, and an Olympic gold medal with the United States Women's National Team (USWNT) at the 2024 Paris Olympics.

In 2022, the San Diego Wave selected Girma first overall in the NWSL draft. She played for the Wave until her recent transfer to Chelsea. As Girma racked up more awards and greater recognition, the Wave knew it would be difficult to continue affording such an asset.

Besides Girma's desire to take a step in a different direction, Chelsea had motivation on their side of the deal as well. In November of 2024, Chelsea FC Women centerback Kadeisha Buchanan tore her anterior cruciate ligament (ACL). This injury added fuel to the fire of Girma's pending move across seas and further tipped the scales in Chelsea's decision to make the contract happen.

Beyond the skills she brings to the pitch, Girma will undoubtedly bring positivity that will reverberate through her new circle of teammates, coaches, and fans.

Girma attended Stanford University as an undergraduate and played Division One soccer alongside her USWNT teammate, Sophia Smith. In 2022, the Stanford goalkeeper and teammate of Girma and Smith, Katie Meyer, took her own life. During the 2023 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup, Girma helped launch the mental health support program Create the Space, in addition to dedicating her World Cup debut to Katie.

"Create the Space was born out of the extraordinary love and extraordinary grief for my best friend and teammate Katie Meyer," Girma said in a post with Common Goal, the company that runs Create the Space, via Instagram.

Create the Space strives to help athletes see vulnerability as their strength and to be aware of mental and physical challenges. In its inaugural year, the program held a mental health retreat for professional women's soccer players in the NWSL, intentionally hosting at least one player from each team.

Today, Girma continues to spread awareness about mental health alongside other professional footballers who have joined her in that mission. She is likely to bring not only her competitiveness and drive to Chelsea but also her commitment to talking about emotional and mental struggles to remind others that no one is alone in these battles.

Though she has not yet played her debut game with Chelsea, football fans are excited to see her light up the field again and elevate the team by being one of the best defenders to exist, as acknowledged by USWNT Head Coach Emma Hayes.

SPORTS BEATS

Men's Basketball

Max Trexler | Staff Writer

Courtesy Photo/Nicole Malm
Joe Reidenbach dribbles to the net in a game against Concord.

The men's basketball team (22-7 overall,11-1 league) closed out playoffs with an ambition to improve and fulfill their identity as a squad.

Approaching the end of the season, the Dons beat Miramonte 79-56 on Feb. 4 and Concord 66-50 on Senior Night.

In their last regular season game, the Dons beat the College Park 75-65 to improve to 11-1 in league and 21-5 overall.

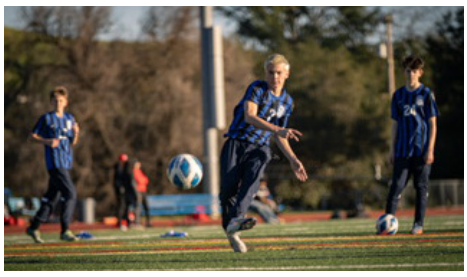
As the team moved into the playoffs, they focused on capitalizing on their strengths and carrying their momentum against tough competition.

"[Our goals for the last few games going into the playoffs include] building off what we did well, and improving what we need to work on, also staying positive in the moment, and looking for every chance to get better. This potential playoff run is new to our program, so we are looking to be better to perform at any level or challenge," Head Coach Bill Powers said.

During the league championship, the team lost in a tight game against Clayton Valley Charter 60-66. In the North Coast Section playoffs, the team won over Archie Williams 78-68, but lost to Redwood on Feb. 21 62-52, closing out the season for the year.

Men's Soccer

Owen Curley | Staff Writer



Contributing Photo/Eric Morford

The men's soccer team (13-4-3 overall, 5-4-1 in league) finished their season with strong performances in league and North Coast Section (NCS) playoffs.

The team has slowed down after their nearly flawless 8-0-1 start and has especially struggled in league games, recently losing to Clayton Valley 3-1 on Feb. 4 and tying Campolindo 2-2 on Feb. 6.

After a 3-1 win over Northgate on Feb. 11 and a 3-2 win over College Park on Feb. 15, the team hoped to carry the momentum over into the postseason.

"Going into the home stretch, we'd love to win our last games in the regular season and make a run at winning the NCS championship," senior Eitan Romick said.

The Dons achieved a big win over Redwood 4-2 in the NCS playoffs, but ended their season with a 2-0 loss against Dougherty Valley.

Women's Basketball

Will Miller | Staff Writer

Blueprint Photo/Audrey Martin
KK Lacanlale calls a play.

The women's basketball team (27-1 overall, 11-0 league) has been on a tear this season with an undefeated league record and is looking forward to a deep playoff run.

The team dominated the Diablo Athletic League tournament, first beating Campolindo 86-20 and then Clayton Valley in the championship game with a final score of 73-39.

The Dons finished out league play against College Park with a commanding victory 81-8 on senior night.

The core players on the team have a lot of experience together and their coaches believe a deep playoff run is imminent.

"The core of our team is a group of seniors who have played together for many many years, so I think we are well-positioned to go into the playoffs because we are not going to see anything we haven't seen before because they have played together so long," Assistant Coach Alexis Tamony said.

In the North Coast Section (NCS) Open Division semifinals, the Dons had a dominant win over Cardinal Neuman 78-52. On March 1, in the NCS Championship game, the Dons won/lost against San Ramon Valley.

Women's Soccer

Samantha Swift | Staff Writer

Courtesy Photo/Danny Polkinhorn
The women's soccer team celebrates their win against Carondelet.

The women's soccer team (10-3 overall, 8-3 league) is eager to elevate their game and work together as a team.

Despite a challenging loss to Miramonte Feb. 9, the team came back, securing a victory over College Park on Feb. 11 with a score of 2-1.

The Dons took on Alhambra in their final regular season game on Feb. 14, winning 2-1.

The team qualified for the division one (D1) bracket of the North Coast Section (NCS) tournament for the first time in program history. They came together to knock out the number one seed Carondelet Cougars on Feb. 22 winning 3-2.

With a solid combination of new and returning varsity players, the team came in even stronger than last season.

"We have made it to this point in the season with a lot of hard work, and we have no intention of letting up. As far as I can remember, the Acalanes women's

program has never played in D1 playoffs, so I am very proud of this year's team," Head Coach Alex Avelar said.

In the NCS semifinals, the team lost to Amador Valley 2-0, closing out their season for the year.

Wrestling

Saaj Shah | Online Editor

Blueprint Photo/Audrey Martin
Hugo Detorres wins his match against Ygnacio Valley

The Acalanes wrestling team's season came to an end at the NCS meet on Feb. 20-21, where every Don who wrestled won at least one match.

Senior Ian Sanftner, junior Amin Noroozi, sophomore Ryan Crane, and sophomore Lilah Kring were standouts as they all finished top 20 in their respective sections at NCS.

The Dons also competed in the Diablo Athletic League championship meet, where highlights included sophomore Gwyneth Lee* finishing third in varsity girls, and Noroozi finishing fourth in varsity boys, and junior Kirian Gracie finishing sixth in varsity boys.

The team faced challenges this year, particularly surrounding their lack of upperclassmen and other roster difficulties.

"We were extremely young once again. We had nine first-year underclassmen wrestlers in our varsity lineup at some point this season. Definitely not ideal, but we did our best," Head Coach Steven Nelsen said.

Unified Basketball

Gwyneth Lee | Staff Writer

Blueprint Graphic/ Cade McAlister

The Unified Basketball program returns for another great season of tournaments and games, with their practices beginning on Feb. 17.

Unified athletes participate in two practices a week with the assistance of student volunteers.

"Schools that have implemented unified sports have also experienced inclusion of the general student body with those that have special needs. It caused very positive change in the campus culture and climate," Unified Sports Director Bill Hansen said.

The first tournament took place on March 5 at the Ultimate Fieldhouse in Walnut Creek in which Acalanes played two teams. The Acalanes team also hopes to host a home game against Miramonte later in the season.

The Unified Basketball program is not just a way to include Unified students in athletics. It can also be an opportunity for general education students to connect with the community.

"[My favorite part is] watching the kids. You get to see the inner reaction between the partners and the athletes, especially kids. I think the partners get more out of this, especially kids do, because they feel a little bit of a bond with these kids and it lasts longer than the sport, it continues throughout the year and beyond," Unified Basketball Tournament Director John Crain said.

Blueprint would like to acknowledge that Gwyneth Lee is a member of Blueprint staff.

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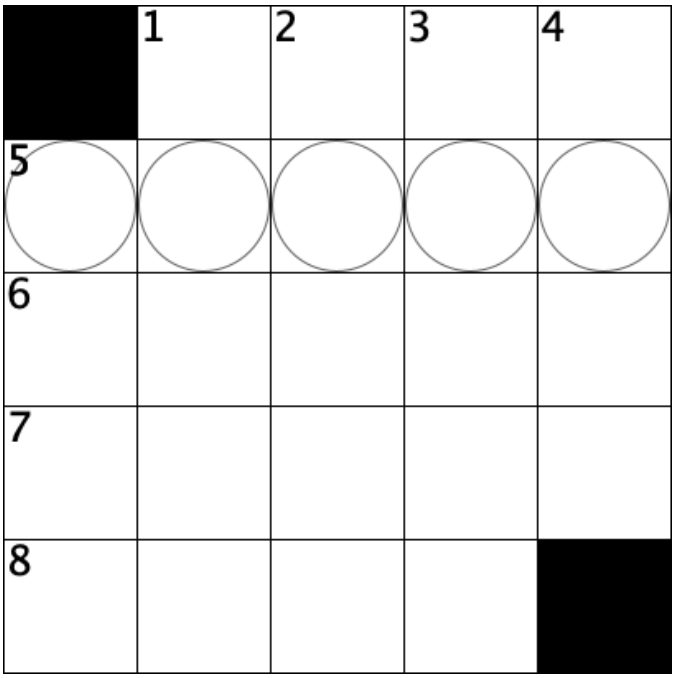
Created by Neve Murphy, Nico Roig, and Sameed Marco | Head Cruciverbalists

Each crossword has theme words regarding music

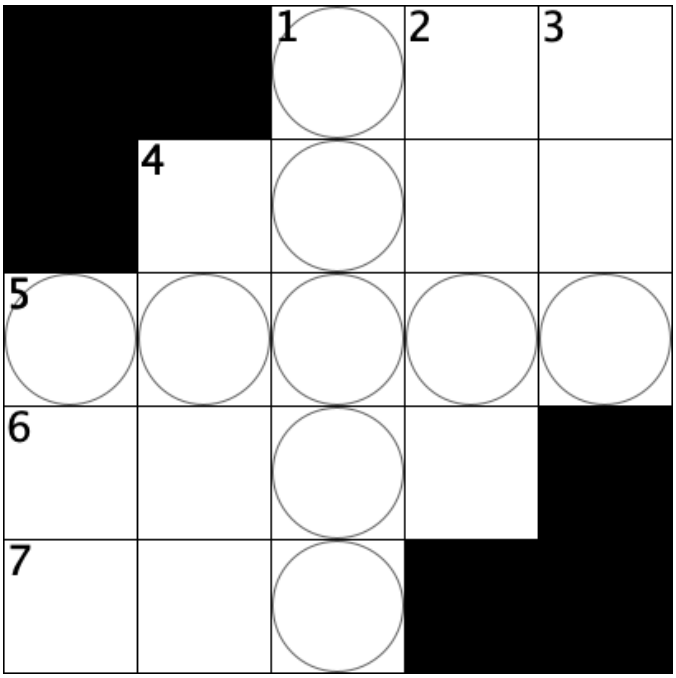


Across

1. Common Italian greeting
5. A straight line connecting two points on a circle
6. Essays can be written on this type of paper
7. Used to conceal one's identity
8. Photos, informally

Down

1. Popular Super Bowl snack
2. Composed of charged particles
3. Surfaces of shapes
4. Factors that influence profit when betting
5. To applaud



Across

1. Where one might go to relax
4. A deceptive scheme
5. Stevie Wonder is known for his skill on this instrument
6. Not moving
7. Elevated surface for hitting a golf ball

Down

1. Where one checks their weight
2. Part of a window
3. "Te ___," expression of love in Spanish
4. in____ or out____
5. "Welcome to the ____ of despair," classic line from *The Princess Bride*

Check Blueprint *Online for crossword answers!*

ATHLETES OF THE ISSUE

Courtesy Photo/ Ryder Malm

Ryder Malm overcomes oponent.

Ryder Malm

Sophie Chinn | Online Editor-in-Chief

As the men's basketball team (22-7 overall, 11-1 league) fought through the postseason, junior Ryder Malm was a standout player for the Dons.

Throughout the season, the six foot seven inches center was a key force for the Dons, impacting the game with rebounding, shot-blocking, and scoring ability.

Malm's ability to dominate in the paint was on full display on Feb. 2, when he put up 30 points and grabbed 14 rebounds in a league win against Miramonte.

Malm's scoring remains impressive, but his playmaking ability has greatly improved.

"[Malm] attracts so much attention that he's learned to be a great passer in the paint. His first look is always to get his teammates open and he's difficult to stop when he's going for offensive rebounds, which has been a game-changer a couple of times this season," teammate and senior Brady Quinn said.

As the team made its playoff run, Malm's high-energy play and clutch moments contributed to their successes.

"Ryder makes plays that excite his teammates and the gym: a big blocked shot, a slam dunk, or a made [three-pointer]. All of those things are fan favorites and can swing games," Head Coach Bill Powers said.

Alexis Le

Haley Chelemedos | Print Managing Editor and Print Head of Layout

Junior Alexis Le has proven herself to be a valuable asset on the women's basketball team (27-1 overall, 11-0 league), fulfilling her role as a captain and contributing to the Dons' high hopes for the season.

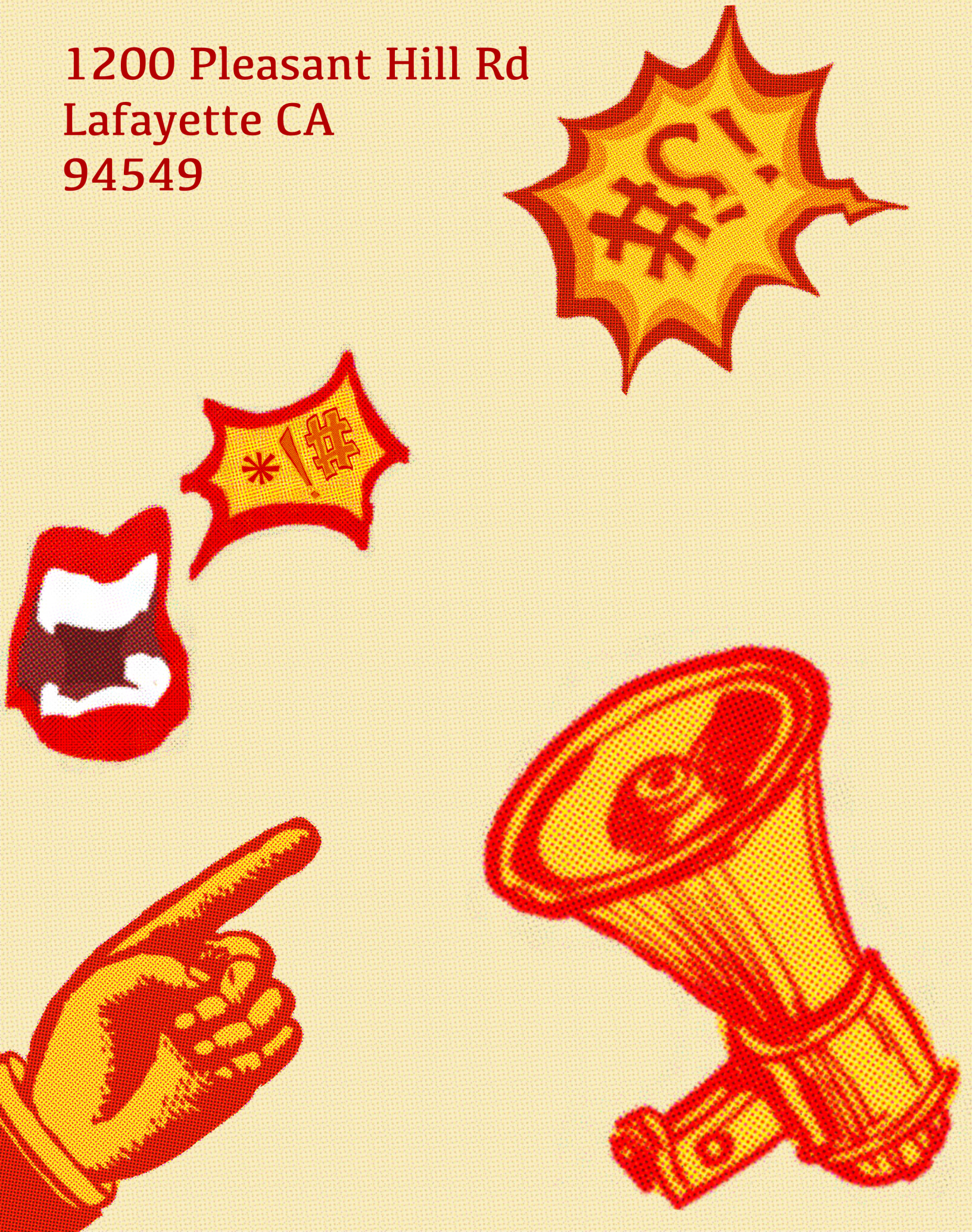
A versatile and dynamic player, Le makes her presence known on offense with precision shots and on defense with rebounds and overall strong coverage. On Jan. 13 against Las Lomas, Le set a school record by sinking eight three-pointers, scoring a total of 36 points.

"I think she contributes the most with her super high shooting accuracy and ability to create shots for both herself and for us, her teammates. Lexi's best basketball skills would be her ball handling and her reliable shooting," teammate and senior Dulci Vail said.

The Dons will lose five seniors after this season, so Le's leadership will play a tremendous role in the coming season.

"She is the only non-senior captain that we have, so ... we're really training her to be a leader for next year as we're losing all that senior leadership. She brings a ton of energy and positivity to the team, so having that in a leadership role is really important," Assistant Coach Alexis Tamony said.

Blueprint Photo/Audrey Martin

Alexis Le prepares to play defense in a game against College Park.

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